MYRTLE BALDWIN

CHARLES CLARK MUNN

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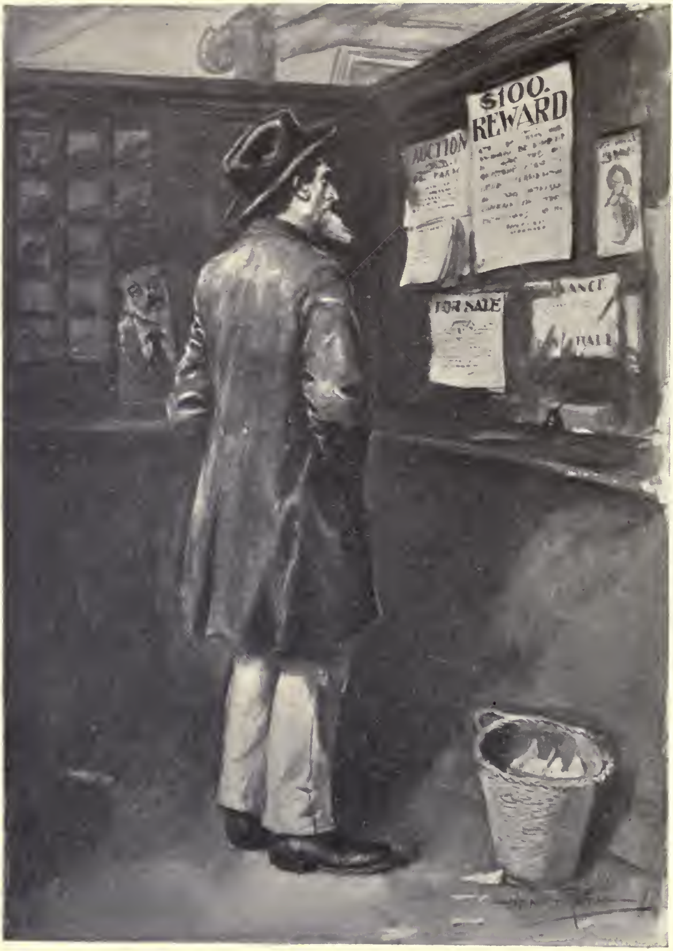
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REWARD
AUCTION
FOR SALE
DANCE
HALL

"Ef that ain't our purty table-gal I'm a goat!"—*Page 293.*

MYRTLE BALDWIN

BY

CHARLES CLARK MUNN

AUTHOR OF

"UNCLE TERRY," "ROCKHAVEN," "THE HERMIT,"
"THE GIRL FROM TIM'S PLACE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

HENRY ROTH

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MYRTLE BALDWIN

INTRODUCTION

As the fairest and most fragrant lily often blooms from the most unpromising spot, so do I believe a noble and heroic soul will rise superior to all the drawbacks of lowly birth, evil environment, and allurements of vice amid poverty.

To those of my friends who thus believe with me and admire moral worth, I offer the pertinent example of this history of Myrtle Baldwin. I also offer an apology for the correlated and enforced presentation of less attractive characters.

Charles Clark Munn.

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A FABLE

When Prometheus was ordained by Zeus to make the creature Man, he fashioned the human ear like a shell that it might gather and augment all sounds. Then to protect his new creation from the siren voice of flattery he called upon Arachne to spin a web over the ears of man so fine that only the whisper of Truth should enter.

But Hermes, spying upon these two, grew jealous, fearing that this mortal would become his rival with the Nymphs, and watching his opportunity before Consciousness came to the new creature, he tore the web away from one ear so that falsehood might enter the brain of Man.

" Glory be," he said in derision as he stole away, " now these mortals shall always hear and believe the thing that is not, for the loud blasts of falsehood entering one ear will overcome the low whisper of Truth in the other for all time."

When Man assumed life and Arachne saw what the boy, Hermes, had done, she was angry and wept.

" Do not grieve, my daughter," said Zeus, who foresaw all things, " for while Truth will benefit Man if heard, he will not relish it at all. Rather will he enjoy falsehood a thousand times more, and die content in his delusions."

MYRTLE BALDWIN

CHAPTER I

THE WAIF

Cap'n Jud squat on an overturned trawl-tub in his dory that July morning, bent forward, seized a mackerel from the half-filled stern compartment, slapped it on the cross-thwart, slit it with an indrawn knife-stroke, tossed the refuse overboard with a flip of its point, and the fish into a tub of water on the floating wharf; a motion and action almost in time with each lift of the boat on the incoming swells. A faint breeze, crisp, salty, and zestful blew into Folly Cove, a ripple of tiny waves spread in blue patches across it, a few gulls circled about; now and then a bolder one poised itself above the fishermen, then dove and snatched a morsel of the floating entrails.

From outside the cove and adown the rock-ribbed shore of Folly Island came the low monotone of the ocean. Two rods above the bent-over, grey, grizzled old man and just emerging from a fish-house beside the narrow spile wharf was a young girl, barefoot, with close-fitting, much-soiled and faded calico dress which failed to reach her browned ankles, and carrying a crate of brine-dripping fish. A man's soft brown hat hid the coils of her black hair, her one garment was brine-soaked and clinging; outlining rounded hips, bust, and shoulders; her face and hands were sun-tanned and eyes big and appealing. For one moment she paused to glance defiantly at the man in the dory, then went up the wharf, her shoulders thrown back to balance the heavy crate, and to a long fish rack where she spread the split fish. This done she returned for more. At this moment her keen young ears caught the sound of oars, and glancing around the fish-house saw a natty cedar yawl with white-duck-clad yachtsman just entering the cove. One, two, three more, long, slow strokes he made then turned, glanced over his shoulder, gave a fillip to one oar and drew alongside the float. Then Cap'n Jud looked up.

"Git out o' sight, gal," he shouted to the watching girl, "don't ye know ye ain't fit to be seen?" and thus commanded she entered the fish-house just as the yachtsman stepped on to the float.

"Good morning, Cap'n Jud," he greeted that man with in a cheery tone. "Have you any lobsters to sell? Little ones, I mean, 'shorts' I believe you call 'em?"

Cap'n Jud looked up with a surly glance.

"I don't ketch shorts," he answered, in grouchy tone.

"But I want some," the younger man asserted, "and I'll pay full price for 'em."

"I don't save shorts, I tell ye," Cap'n Jud growled, "it's agin the law," and he turned to his fish-splitting once more.

"Oh, I know all about the law," the new arrival persisted, evidently versed in the ways of lobster catchers. "I don't suppose you save shorts or sell 'em. I'll make you a present of five dollars, however, for fifty," and he smiled down at the sulky one.

At this moment the girl, Pandora-like, peeped out of the fish-house, then emerged, and stood watching the two men.

"Here's the money," he continued, peeling it from a roll he produced. "I'll be back in half an hour and shall expect to find my lobs waiting for me on this float."

"Wal, mebbe," grunted Cap'n Jud, stepping out of his dory and taking the money, "I don't sell shorts ez I said, but per'aps I kin find ye some."

At this instant his eyes rested on the girl.

"Keep out o' sight, ye hussy," he shouted once more, "Damn ye, why don't ye mind!" and grasping one of the split fish he threw it at her. It struck her on the bosom, leaving a bloody smooch, and again she entered the fish-house, her face aflame with shame and anger.

"My name's Mason, Mark Mason," the arriving one now declared, ignoring Cap'n Jud's conduct, "and I'm from a yacht that just run into the cove. I'll see you later," and glancing up to where the girl had vanished once more, he turned, cast off his boat and pulled away.

But that girl's face, her rounded form, bare feet and ankles, and appealing eyes, had been photographed on his mind.

"Come out now 'n' go about yer work," Cap'n Jud again shouted to her in the same harsh, commanding tone, and then stepped into his dory and resumed his fish-splitting. "She's growin' more 'n' more like her mother, cuss her," he muttered looking up as the girl appeared, "and 'twon't be long 'fore she'll be runnin' after men. Ef I'd been Godamighty I'd 'a' made wimmen jist like men folks, I would. Sich ez her hez the wiles o' the devil in 'em, 'n' sure to make trouble."

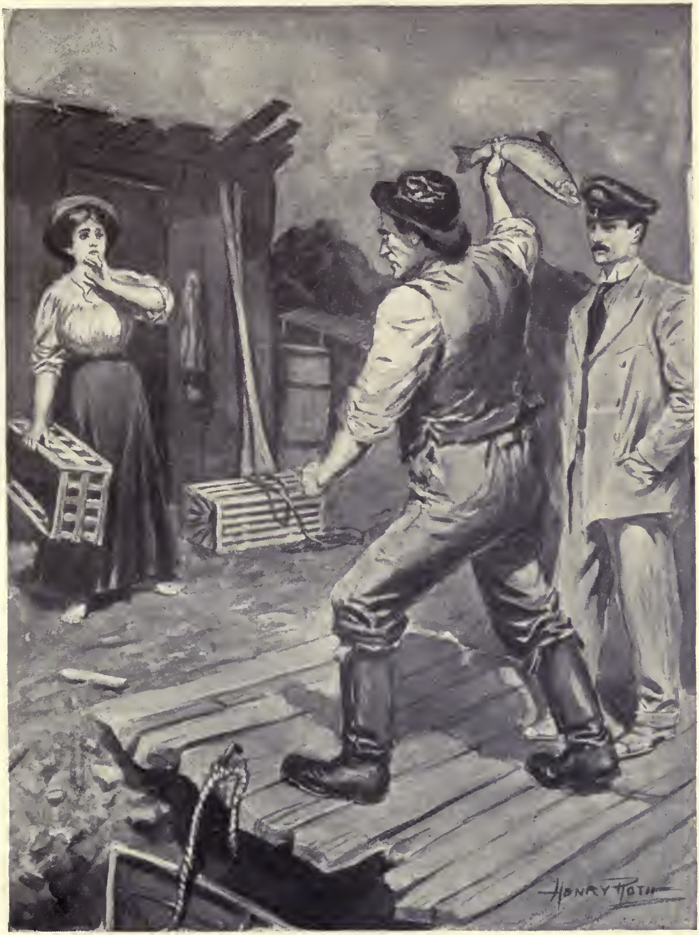
Once more he bent forward, seized a fish, split it, tossed it into the tub with the same monotonous motion; once more his dory rose and fell on the slow, incoming swells; and once more the girl lifted and bent herself backward from her burden. But a keener sense of the injustice of her lot and a deeper hatred of this tyrant grandfather now surged in her heart.

Outside the cove, however, Mark shipped his oars and let his boat ride the incoming waves while he scanned the wharf, the old wreck forming a bulwark for it, the fish-house, and Folly Island. Up from the wharf some fifty rods stood a long, low house built lean-to fashion, with one roof and port hole windows in the upper part. To the right of this the cove narrowed into a passage two rods wide bridged midway, thus forming the island, a half-mile long triangle, rock-ribbed and bush-covered. Around the shore facing him were a series of low out-jutting cliffs with inlets between — a titanic jaw-bone, with menacing teeth against which the swells were dashing. But it was the wharf and the two actors in this heartless drama that now interested Mark most. One he could not see, the other, the girl, was bending over a low lattice rack spreading fish. He could see her even now quite plainly, and the round outlines of her figure and her bare feet.

"You brute," he muttered, recalling what he had witnessed and the harsh words hurled at her by this grumpy Cap'n Jud, "I'd like to have kicked you into the sea once for luck."

Who the girl was or what her relation to this old sea-dog he knew not. Only that this erstwhile sea captain and now fisherman who owned Folly Island was, as now demonstrated, a surly brute. Another fact also that was now unknown to Mark Mason was, that upon this treeless, barren, rock-ribbed, seldom-visited island, owned by Captain Judson Baldwin and where dwelt his spinster sister, Perth, and waif grandchild, Myrtle Baldwin, there rested a mortgage of one thousand dollars with ten years accrued interest, nor did he know that in this girl — a slave here almost — lay the outcome of a woman's betrayal by a bigamist.

Toward the yacht, and unconscious of this interwoven complication, Mark now turned his boat and pulling alongside its lowered steps climbed aboard. Frank and the five other young fellows ("Injuns," Mark called them all from their gambling and Bacchanalian proclivities), were in the cabin deeply absorbed in the almost continuous game of draw-poker, the crew of four were lazily polishing everything of brass in sight, while the skipper reclining in an easy chair on the canopied after-deck, was smoking and eyeing things generally. To go to the cabin and take a look into it was Mark's next move,



"Keep out o' sight, ye hussy!"—*Page 3.*

and as none of the absorbed group even noticed him by a glance, he turned to the deck again and took a seat beside the skipper.

"Wal," drawled that important personage (known as Cap'n Sim, and a veteran coaster), "how'd ye find Cap'n Jud, cranky ez usual?"

"Rather," answered Mark smiling, "but he mellowed a little at sight of money. Do you know him?"

"Jest a leetle," responded this Yankee skipper, "he useter sail the Dolphin, a coaler, 'n' I met him some in port. Reg'l'r rip-snorter, they said, to his men in them days. Used a cat on 'em now 'n' then and all that sort. She fetched up on Monomoy one night 'bout thirty years ago, 'n' arter that I lost sight o' him fer a spell. Heard 'bout him a few years ago, 'n' how he bought this island 'n' took to fishin'. Some trouble, too, 'bout his darter Myrtle runnin' away soon arter, 'n' her baby bein' left on his door-step. Cap'n Jud was also part owner o' this coaler 'n' lost everything likewise I heerd, an' that 'n' 'tother trouble follerin' sorter upsot his temper which was bad 'nuff to start with, I cal'late," and Cap'n Sim paused to relight his pipe.

"But what about this baby?" queried Mark, now keenly interested and thinking of the barefoot girl. "How long ago was this runaway affair?"

"Oh, 'bout twenty years or so fer a guess," returned Cap'n Sim. "I ain't over sartin 'bout any o' these facts, all hearsay ye know, 'n' I hain't sot eyes on Cap'n Jud sence he lost his vessel. Wouldn't know him to-day if I did. Only jist rec'-lect the main p'ints o' his make-up, 'n' that's why I axed ye if he was cranky. He hadn't many friends, either, 'mongst his men, one viage was 'nuff fer most on 'em they said, an' in port he allus was growlin' 'bout suthin."

"And didn't you ever hear why his daughter ran away," interrupted Mark, "or what became of her? Did she fetch the baby back?"

"Wal," responded Cap'n Sim after puffing a cloud of smoke aloft as if that was of more interest than this scandal, "I guess 'twas fer the same reason his men quit him, cussed crankiness. And I heerd his wife died on't, sorter druv to her death by his tantrums ez it war, 'n' the same thing started his darter off I was told. Who fetched the baby back I never heerd, howsomever."

And so a little of Cap'n Jud's history and this abused waif's as well was now doled out by Cap'n Sim. More of it than is here quoted was also related by this keen-eyed, old Yankee salt of retentive memory and drawling speech, for he had been gatherer of coast news of all sorts and wide-apart location many years. And the more he told, the more Mark realized what a surly, selfish, bumptious, contemptible old martinet, scoffer, infidel, and all-around brute Cap'n Jud was; how his wife must have suffered, and why his daughter was driven away. Also the more than wretched existence this waif grandchild must now be leading. The one riddle of the entire drama was how and why this runaway and betrayed daughter should have been so merciless as to send or bring her child and leave it in the care of such a brute. That was beyond Mark. Meanwhile, and as the sun neared the zenith and the day grew hotter, he watched this girl still at her work in the blinding, sizzling heat. At last Cap'n Jud emerged from beyond the wreck and fish-house and bent and bowed a little, made his way up to his dwelling, the girl soon followed, and then Mark bethinking himself of his short lobsters, pulled ashore and found them awaiting him on the wharf.

CHAPTER II

MARK MASON

Mark Mason was a young man of the world; genial, generous, kindly, a lover of Nature and the beautiful, easily touched by the troubles of others, forgiving of their shortcomings and a half-poet when amid poetic surroundings. On the other hand, he was a confirmed cynic, distrustful of all human assertions, a doubter of scriptural claims, yet a believer in religious influence, lazily indifferent to woman's charms and keen at money-making. In short, a well poised man of thirty who had been in touch with both the under and upper crust of life without being harmed by either, and meantime, had garnered enough of this world's goods to live modestly upon his income. He was also what may be called an institution product. That is, he was one of those unfortunates who, never knowing who his parents were, take the first steps in life at an orphanage. From this and at the age of ten, Mark was transplanted to Good Will Farm — a noble philanthropy the State of Maine can feel proud to have within her borders — and here under the careful guidance of Rev. George W. Hinckley, Mark learned the ordinary book lessons and the better ones of honesty, frugality, gratitude, and self-reliance, together with something of veneration for his Creator.

There was also a mysterious woman connected with his transition from the orphan asylum to Good Will Farm. He could recall seeing her at the first-named place, a well gowned and veiled lady who he was told called to learn what steps were necessary to secure the right of a child's removal. She again appeared at the latter institution a year after Mark's advent there, to be courteously shown its methods, management, and how the philanthropic work was carried on. It was only a brief call, however, on one of the usual visiting days, and she remained veiled as before. Neither did she apparently notice Mark more than any other of the fifty-odd boys and girls then there. Only when she was ready to depart — and this was the astounding fact — she handed the Rev. Mr. Hinckley a package with a request not to open it until the next Christmas day. When that arrived three months later, the packet was found to contain ten one hundred dollar bills in an envelope addressed "For Good Will Farm," also a savings bank book bearing the name of Mark

Master Mason and containing the same sum with request it be given him at the age of twenty-one!

Never afterwards was she seen at the farm. Later inquiries at this savings bank were fruitless except for the receiving teller's admission that a veiled lady made the deposit, and so Mark Mason (the name he used for simplicity and to separate himself from this mysterious connection), started life's battle with more means than most boys handicapped by the bar sinister. When he left Good Will Farm at eighteen it was to take a position as stock clerk in a wholesale woolen house in a near-by city, that came to him unsolicited — also a mysterious fact. He graduated from that in two years, to a travelling salesman's life, followed that eye-opening, "on the road" vocation seven more and then "struck it rich." That is, he saw a chance to make some money, had the courage to try for it, and succeeded.

He had been sent to Texas the year previous to the celebrated Brown-Sully cotton-cornering episode, there learned the inside facts regarding the boll weevil injury to the cotton crop, and returning first consulted his good friend Hinckley, then drew his heritage and accrued interest from the bank, added all his savings and back salary to that fund and bought cotton futures on a margin. It was a gamble pure and simple and one not advisable to follow in one case out of a hundred. But it won out in Mark's case, for he was betting on the actual conditions that he knew existed, and in three short months his holdings showed a net profit of over fifty thousand dollars. Then with more wisdom than most margin gamblers, he sold out, quit the game, invested his money in good securities, forgot the cotton market and kept on selling woolens. His acquaintance with this Frank Goodnow — a rich young spendthrift and happy-go-lucky Lothario — came about during Mark's three months' orgie in the cotton market, the fellows with Frank were club friends of both, yet none really intimate with Mark; he merely joining the party to have a vacation. Neither had Mark any home or ties of any kind except what drew him to Good Will Farm, and Thanksgiving and Christmas days always found him there, a welcome guest in the Hinckley home. And so life had resolved itself into a successful and fairly happy one for Mark, barring the unfortunate fact of his origin and the incessant and always vexing hope that he might some day learn who the veiled lady was and what was the reason for her interest in him. He had no clues, and felt that none were likely to be obtained by him. All he knew was that some well-to-do woman had shaped and directed his life from babyhood up, and wisely, too; but who, why, and for what reason (except a shameful one), was a mystery, dark, and sinister, and likely to remain so.

And that feeling and its influence were the main reasons why Mark had early learned the wisdom of keeping all his own affairs to himself.

And now; ashore on the little float where this Cap'n Jud had left his purchase of short lobsters, with a brief outline of that irascible man's history and a suggestion of who this handsome young fisher-girl might be; Mark felt a new mystery had been disclosed to him and a keen interest to follow it. And why not? The girl had caught his eyes and sympathy both within two minutes, and Mark now began to feel himself almost a knight errant called upon, not to defend and rescue her as yet, but to find out who she was and what her life here had been.

His first step, now that the chance offered, was to look about this landing spot, and there was much to interest him as well. The wharf; a narrow make-shift affair built from bits of wreckage and resting on rocks and barnacled spiles, sloped up from the float. At its shore end and partly resting on a boulder stood the fish-house; outside that the gaping ribs and keel of the wreck whose deck and side-sheathing had doubtless been used for the wharf, and all about were evidences of the same makeshift utility. A fish rack alongside the cove and also resting on rocks was built from wreckage. A pile of rusty anchor chain and an anchor lay near it. Back of that stood a huge net reel with net wound upon it. An iron kettle held in position between rocks stood near the fish-house half full of ill-smelling oil. Fallen-apart barrels were scattered near, and in the fish-house were tubs of split fish in pickle. Lobster pots, mostly with missing slats, were scattered all about, an overturned dory reposed high up on the shore, and the entire confusion of wreck and tangle of rocks, fish-house, and the flotsam and jetsam of a fisherman's calling smelled worse than fishy.

All this Mark saw in a ten-minutes' inspection, and its disclosure was one of poverty and the evidences of slothful indifference. Then he took his box of lobsters and rowed back to the yacht.

It was mid-day, ere Mark, watching from the yacht, noticed any signs of life on the island, then he saw Cap'n Jud leave the house, go to the wharf, launch his dory, and pull away to seaward. A little later the girl came down and began turning the fish on the racks. Mark, more interested now, ascended to the yacht's pilot house and watched her with the skipper's binocular. He could see her quite distinctly, too, still garbed as before. Also that she oft paused in her work to look at the yacht. A half-hour of this, then dinner was announced and Mark went below.

It was two hours ere he thought of the girl again, for after dinner the inevitable game of draw was soon started between the rest of the party with Mark, as usual, a complaisant observer, and it was mid-afternoon before he came on deck again.

And now the sea in repose, was like a vast, undulating mirror, reflecting the sun's yellow glow with a fringe of white wave-wash outlining the near shore of Folly Island.

And the girl was nowhere to be seen.

Once more Mark, glancing at the skipper fast asleep in a hammock, entered the pilot house and swept the island with the glass. A long, careful scrutiny and then a small flock of gulls circling about one spot on the further shore of the island caught his attention. They were evidently finding something of unusual interest there as they wheeled about or poised an instant in mid-air to dive down to the shore and their shrill cries reached Mark above the low wave-wash. And now, impelled by an occult intuition he could never afterwards quite account for, Mark stole quietly away from the yacht and pulled ashore once more. No one was at the landing.

Cap'n Jud's big dory was also gone, and as Mark made his yawl fast and stepped out and up the wharf, only the more pronounced fishy smell, the swarm of flies about the fish house, and the gaunt rib bones of the old wreck greeted him. Then on past the long fish rack, now adding to the odor by its burden of drying cod, and up the winding path he strode. Half way to the low brown house ahead of him he halted for a careful look, but no one was visible. He noted its weather-beaten shabbiness — this story-and-a-half turkey coop, almost — with here and there a clapboard missing and one or two squares of board doing duty for absent window panes. A ship's figure-head, once green, was perched over the open door. An old brown dory, earth-filled, in which were blooming flowers, lay alongside the house front. To the right, a little outbuilding of stone-wall and wreck-roof construction, with a few hens idling about it. To the left, a wall-enclosed garden with wall half-hid by green, growing vines, and at one corner of the house a ship's top-mast rising from a mound of stones. For five minutes Mark conned this quaint, unique, and half-pathetic abode, surmising that its inmates must be asleep on the hot summer afternoon, then he sheered off from the well-trodden path until just below the garden he came to another, and in a hollow below an open well with its pole and rusty-tin-pail. A moment's glance at this make-shift evidence of human existence, with its enclosing circle of rank growing grass and green sedge, and Mark strolled on following a faintly outlined path down the island. This soon vanished also, and then perforce he began to pick his way among a tangle of rocks, bayberry bushes, scrub spruce, and Mohawk briars. A hundred rods of this, and he came to a hollow and in it a half-acre lakelet or pond, white with blooming water lilies, and around half of which arose a fringing wall of cat-tails. Near this also stood a cow watching him with solemn, curious eyes. From here he could see the flock of gulls, quite near, though over on the further side of the island and still in evident excitement. Toward them he now slowly advanced, pausing occasionally to study the rock-ribbed configuration of this inhospitable island or scan the smoothly undulating ocean about it. He was in no hurry. His time was all his own. He had come ashore merely on a curiosity quest and to see what manner of spot this island was.

It was a not over promising one for any known or unknown purpose except it be to find solitude, and of that Mark now felt there was an ample supply. He even halted to enjoy a little of it from the top of a broad, flat boulder on a hillock and here with back to the sun he seated himself and lit a cigar. Only for a moment, for Old Sol was aggressive, did the spray tossing up on the point suggest a bit of breeze there, and Mark strolled on. And now near the lower end of the island and in an embrasure overlooking the ocean, he came upon a queer little half-open stone hut or rather shed. It was perhaps six feet in height and five in diameter, built of flat stones and roofed over with bits of wreckage. On top of this and overlapping the entire structure were broad strips of copper sheathing, doubtless from some wreck, and green from exposure, while an outer wall of sods, grass-grown, closed the back and side chinks of the stone walls. It was a most unique hut, a playhouse evidently, for as Mark peeped in the half-open side, he saw little shelves out-jutting from the walls and on them a museum, almost, of shells and sea curios. There were in addition to every sort of shell known to this coast, dried star-fish of all sizes, sailor's money purses, shells of all kinds of crabs, bits of glass and many-colored pebbles. Lobster claws of various sizes stuck out from chinks in the walls, the floor was entirely paved with grey and white pebbles worn smooth by the sea waves, an old arm chair, minus the back spindles, stood in one corner, near it was a box with open side and divided by a shelf. In this lay several books.

For fully five minutes Mark stood looking into this curious, half-pathetic, and altogether interesting little cubby-house, out of which the low monotone of the near-by ocean seemed to echo, and then he stepped inside and picked up one of the books.

It was "Fox's Book of Martyrs"!

For a moment he glanced over its old-style print and grewsome pictures. Then he returned it to its shelf and took up another. That was a later work, "The Toilers of the Sea," by Victor Hugo. Two other books were in this tiny library, both as incongruous to the spot and Folly Island, for one was "Strathmore," by Ouida, the other a well-thumbed copy of Longfellow's poems. The wide-apart tone and tenor of these works made Mark smile. Only for a moment, however, for the hid-away location of this queer, big-child playhouse held his attention and touched his feelings, as naught else could.

"It's the doings of that girl I saw," he mused as he emerged and faced about to look at it once more. "And it's evident she has no companions to share her solitude. She must be of some mental scope however. But 'Fox's Book of Martyrs'!

Ye Gods! And to read that here where the sea is forever moaning!"

For another five minutes Mark stood watching this odd and pathetic bit of handiwork that must have consumed many days in its construction, noted where creeping vines had recently been planted around the base of the sod wall, and then turned away. And now some fifty rods above this hut, on the coast, he once more noticed the flock of gulls circling about and diving down behind a cliff. To this he now hastened and then going more slowly and crouching as he neared its top, so as not to scare the birds, he saw the cause of their clamor, for seated in a niche on the opposite side of a narrow rock-walled cove was this same girl he had noticed that morning, just tossing a fish head out on the water and watching the gulls fight for it. He could see her now close to, clad in faded calico and bareheaded, the soft felt hat beside her on the rock, face sun-tanned, big black eyes, and one bare brown foot and ankle peeping out from beneath her dress. He could see too, her full rounded bust and fine shoulders outlined distinctly, a smile at the gulls' antics disclosing her white teeth, and all in all, a romantic and pretty picture. To crouch thus and watch her he felt was unfair yet irresistible, and so for a few moments he did this. Then he arose, the girl saw him, and with a little cry of fear sprang to her feet and stared at him with wide-open frightened eyes.

CHAPTER III

A HERITAGE OF SHAME

Cap'n Jud had never been popular at Sandy Bay or even welcome, and that village's dislike began the day of his arrival on Barney McCann's ancient carryall — the sole connection between that fishing port and civilization.

"Be gob, but the looks o' that man 'ud sour milk," Barney observed soon after to Amos Orton, who owned the one general store and post office, "and spakin' about kickers, be me sowl I'm thinkin' he'd kick if he war dead. He dom'd me horse 'n' wagon 'fore we'd gone a mile, an' ivery hill we come to; he dom'd the flies, the sun, the sand, an' he dom'd me, begorra, for not spakin' an' answerin' to all his kicks! An' thin I did. 'I dunno who ye be,' I sed, 'an' I don't care a dom, but be gob ye have a timper like red pepper, so ye hov. An' I didn't ax ye to ride,' sez I, 'an' if ye don't like me an' me hoss ye'd better git out an' walk, an' good riddance to ye,' sez I."

"'Be ye paid fer bein' sassy,' says he, glarin' at me."

"'I ain't paid fer nothin' yit,' sez I, 'not even fer yer ride an' I ain't shure I will be,' an' then he shut up."

This tirade, repeated by Barney again that evening in the store and before Sandy Bay's Old Guard usually gathered there, was the key note of Cap'n Jud's name and fame, and all his future acts only served to increase his ill-repute. His first visit there was also brief and its result the purchase of Folly Island, a worthless tangle of rocks and scrub spruce, from Jason Lee. The one semi-redeeming feature of this investment of two hundred dollars was that it gave Jason, a worthless sot and lazy fisherman combined, the means to pay up at Orton's store and have enough left for a month-long drunk. What Cap'n Jud wanted of Folly Island did not then transpire. Later, when he again appeared, hired a man and erected an oddly shaped dwelling upon his purchase, it dawned on Sandy Bay that they were to have him for a neighbor. Still later when he brought thither his "wimmen folks," consisting of a spinster sister, Perth, and comely grown-up daughter, Myrtle, and took up his abode on Folly Island, that surmise was verified. In the interim it had been learned by Sandy Bayites that he was formerly captain and part owner of a coaster, had met shipwreck and loss of all, including that of his wife, later, and that he had achieved the reputation (verified by Barney) of being a surly tyrant on shipboard, a soured, misanthropic, all-around grumbler and sceptic combined. It was also whispered in Sandy Bay that this loss of his vessel on Cape Cod during a calm, foggy night was the outcome of a feud between himself and his first mate. But this did not concern Sandy Bay, and had Cap'n Jud shown any disposition to be neighborly and civil most of this would have been forgiven. But he did not and was ignored accordingly.

Other causes for dislike came later. His daughter departed one day in Barney's carryall; confiding to him that she meant never to return to Folly Island but giving no reason why. Reasons were easily surmised, however. Cap'n Jud made no explanation of it, though; in fact he always had held and continued to hold himself aloof from Sandy Bay except in connection with the fewest business transactions possible. And then, two years later, came the one most astounding scandal Sandy Bay had ever known when it was learned that a baby had arrived at Folly Island and was being cared for by Cap'n Jud's sister! Whose it was was guessed at once, but how it came there was a mystery beyond all. That was of scant interest however, the one pertinent fact was the baby itself, and that Cap'n Jud's harsh treatment of his daughter had driven her away with this outcome. That also resulted in keeping him away from Sandy Bay more than ever and in his making Dark Harbor, another fishing village four miles from Folly Island, the base of his supplies.

But this waif throve and grew in spite of the "bar sinister," Cap'n Jud's evil temper, and her hopeless, helpless lot. In time also she appeared at Orton's store with this Aunt Perth, a little calico-clad, black-eyed tot to whom even Sandy Bay was a new wonder-world. Still later she arrived alone at the opening of the fall school term and began her progress up the hill of knowledge. She was exemplary, obedient, timid to a degree, made friends with other children, and all went well until she (as she inevitably would be) was informed of her shameful origin and made to feel its stain. After that poor Myrtle — that name she bore — became more shy, and the older she grew the more she held herself aloof from her mates. Only one of them, a girl two years older and the daughter of Jason Lee, kept intimate with her, and just why, is as unaccountable as the formation of any schoolmate friendship. But Lucinda, or "Cindy," a blue-eyed, impulsive lass, who appeared to have inherited her father's stock of oaths and who got whipped for repeating them, became Myrtle's one best friend even to the extent of using said cuss-words in her defense later on.

In due time also Myrtle attained the age of children's parties and now again more than ever was she made to feel her status in life. By now also, her pride began to rebel and the "if-you-don't-want-me-I-don't-want-you" feeling to crop out as an influence. Her clothing, always the simplest and poorest possible, became a factor as well, and she and Cindy (much alike in this respect) to be companions in raiment isolation. Church-going as Myrtle grew up, was likewise not for her for the same reason, with the added one that nobody ever invited her to attend. There was also a reason for this, for Sandy Bay was very orthodox; those who were in its one church fold were firm believers in close communion; that sins of the parents shall be visited upon the children even unto the fourth generation, and that what's bred in the bone will appear in the flesh. Also that poor Myrtle; a parentless waif, was a living, pertinent example of sin, and the devil's doings. The course of reasoning up to this conclusion with them was like two and two make four, and as undeniable. Cap'n Jud, to begin with, was an infidel, scoffer at all good things, and desecrator of the Sabbath, besides being ill-tempered and selfish. Proof number one. His offspring, inheriting the same evil impulses, had run away to embrace the flesh and the devil, and to show her defiance of law and gospel, had sent its fruits back to Folly Island. Proof number two. Her child, sulky and sullen, with eyes perpetually suspicious and fearsome, was one more link in this evil chain and therefore to be avoided. And so she was. And for that reason other children — quick to catch their parents' opinions — also avoided her. Worse than that, the older she grew — and the more handsome as well — the more certain they were that she would in due time follow her mother's steps. A little pity was intermingled with this merciless conclusion, for by the time Myrtle was twelve a few had bethought themselves of trying to Christianize her; one woman even asking Aunt Perth why she did not come to church and bring the girl; only to be told that it was out of the question for the reason Cap'n Jud would not allow it; and so that door was shut. In fact, as always in this world, no doors were opened to a girl of her origin and probable future, except those she would best not enter, and Cindy's was of that order. The natural gravitation of these two toward one another as they grew up had also prejudiced Sandy Bay against Myrtle, and for the same congenital reasons. First, Cindy's father had married a woman of low birth, both addicted to drink. Two children had been the result of this, the elder, Cindy, an exact picture of her mother, the other, a girl also, was unlike either parent and so of course did not count in the chain. This one, Mary Lee, younger than Cindy, had assumed charge of the Lee home after the mother passed on and in opposition to Sandy Bay's ideas of proper sequence. Then, later, Mary had shown herself better behaved than Cindy in trying to keep their poor home in order, attending church, and pleading with her father to abstain from drink, while Cindy only laughed at him, and by the time Myrtle left school, had begun to consort with young men of scant moral character. But the intimacy between Myrtle and Cindy was kept up, nevertheless, and while the roystering young fishermen were not parties to it as yet, Sandy Bay believed they would be in due time. It was a case of "birds of a feather" beyond question, and while the wings of one — Myrtle — were not yet soiled, it was a presupposed and inevitable outcome that they must be.

But all this sinister rating was unknown to Myrtle. Cindy had been the only one she could confide in and obtain love from at school, the only friend who ever defended her from sneers or tendered her sympathy in misfortune, or lack of suitable clothing. These reasons — ample enough, also — kept the two in friendship in spite of all gossip, and this continued after Myrtle left school and took up her life of drudgery on Folly Island. Neither was Myrtle cognizant of the evil name Cindy soon attained, and when it was hinted at to her, which was seldom, she in turn was ready to defend one who had been her friend.

There was no consolation in Myrtle's later life, either, for Aunt Perth, mortally afraid of her brother and dependent upon him for food, shelter, and everything, dared not say her soul was her own and beyond that felt somewhat as he did regarding the shame and scandal which had been forced upon them. She pitied the helpless waif, of course — a woman must. She had cared for her and brought her up as best she could, made clothes for her, taught her, and fulfilled a mother's part in all possible ways. She loved her also in a timid, silent way; would have been more outspoken in it had she dared; but to interfere between her and Cap'n Jud, to try to overcome his dislike, hatred in fact, and defend Myrtle against his fits of temper was beyond her.

Neither had Cap'n Jud ever admitted any kinship to Myrtle in word or deed. She called him Grandfather and he answered to it. He called her "Mert" or "Here you" with a snarl and she obeyed in fear and trembling, and that was about the measure of their relations. No interest in her was shown by him. She was on his hands that was all, to be fed, clothed, schooled a little, endured all the time, and set to work as soon as old enough. And so she grew up unloved, not wanted, barely tolerated, and conscious of her shameful birth at all times, or as soon as old enough to realize what birth meant. And this, briefly outlined, was the position of Myrtle Baldwin on Folly Island that summer morn when Mark Mason saw her so grossly insulted and demeaned before his very eyes.

How Cap'n Jud felt towards her can easily be determined. From the very moment he first saw her a babe well wrapped in an oblong basket on his doorstep, and just opening her eyes to the morning sun, he had felt to curse her. The little card inscribed "Call her Myrtle" and her big black eyes — his own daughter's exactly — had told the shameful tale in an instant, and from that moment on he had hated the burden thus thrust upon him.

And what Cap'n Jud hated was abhorred with deep, undying, persistent, and despicable hate.

From his own viewpoint — as from that of many another arrogant brute, misnamed man — his peculiar, selfish, cynical, harshness had no bearing on that trouble at all or on his daughter's conduct. The only personage he believed in was the devil. A woman's beauty always had been and always would be Satan's chance to wreck souls. The Garden of Eden fable — so considered by him — had been the first historic one, and from that time onward his Satanic Majesty had kept the game going. Worse than that, he also believed that all grace and intellectual charm in woman was in the same line and given with the same intent, to lure men for the devil's purpose.

But "God's dice are always loaded."

No man can hate except he reap hatred. No man can strike another but that the uncurled lash will smite him in due time. No wrong, no injustice can be meted out to another without a penalty following. Yet this Cap'n Jud; this brute in human form was, in so hating and maltreating a helpless, hapless waif, only tossing the dice of Fate against a Power he no more comprehended than he did why the tides ebbed and flowed or luck had always seemed against him. Neither did he realize that the money he once borrowed from a rich ship owner on the worthless security of Folly Island — and never meant to pay back — would sometime become a Nemesis; or that this genial, jaunty, young yachtsman who came ashore to buy lobsters of him would prove another.

There was still one more force at work to undo and punish Cap'n Jud which he little realized, and that was the thought and will-power of this hated waif. More than that and unknown to him, he had furnished her means for its development. He was, despite his brutal nature, a man of keen mind and well read. He had also during his many voyages gathered numerous and diverse books. And a curious mixture they were too! Works by Voltaire, Hume, Paine, and other atheistic writers; books on geology, astronomy, and sciences; also of history and travel. There were novels as well by Hugo, Balzac, Dumas, Eliot, Scott, and Ouida; poems by Longfellow, Byron, Pope, and Burns; and to complete the unique library, Fox's Book of Martyrs, Robinson Crusoe, and Uncle Tom's Cabin.

As soon as Myrtle was recalled from school she began reading this queer literary medley at odd moments when the chance came, or for hours in a nook down on the point of Folly Island when her work was done and task-master away. And she read them thoroughly and faithfully, the novels especially, and many times over. Some of the books were beyond her and dull. Others opened her eyes to new people, high ideals, noble deeds, and a wonder-world of loyal love and self-sacrifice. She began to think for herself, to see herself by comparison with others, and better than that, how her own conduct in life must and would make or mar her happiness as well. In a way she grew to be or meant to be if the chance came, like the gracious, tender, and loyal heroines, who endured all things for love's sake, and won all honor and devotion in payment. To her these tales were true ones, these people were real, and absorbing their lives as she now did, she aspired to become like them and some day escape Folly Island and her slave life here. Then, too, to enjoy this world of romance and new people all perfect, and to dream of another life in, she built herself a stone hut in this niche and as an assistant to this idyllic, romantic, day-dream pastime,— her own little world — she cleared and tended a small flower garden near by. The latent force of virtue, honor, and love of the beautiful was in her; these books and these dreams encouraged and developed it; and all unknown to her she educated herself into something better than the hard-worked, ill-clad, fisher maid, Mark first saw her to be.

CHAPTER IV

ONE SUMMER AFTERNOON

Mark Mason; gallant, impressionable, yet admiring womankind only in a half-cynical, analytical way; saw this girl's scared look as she faced him beside the cove and spoke accordingly.

"Don't be afraid of me," he said quietly, advancing a few steps and smiling. "I won't harm you."

She made no answer but stood like a statue in the rock-walled niche, watching him while the gulls kept up their clamor.

"I beg pardon for intruding," he continued in the same mellifluous tone, "but it was your gulls that brought me here."

His smile and halt ten feet away seemed to reassure her.

"I was scared for a minute," she answered, "you come onto me so sudden."

"I saw you this morning at the wharf," he rejoined nonchalantly, and seating himself on a rock in an "at home" manner. "My name's Mason, Mark Mason, and I'm from the yacht anchored in the cove. What is your name?"

"Mine's Myrtle — Baldwin," she returned, hesitating over the last one, "or just Mert, as folks calls me."

"And Cap'n Jud's granddaughter, I'm told," Mark added, "so now as we are properly introduced sit down again and feed your gulls. I like to watch them scrapping. I've done it myself from the yacht and they will follow for miles. Do you feed yours often?" he continued after watching that proceeding a moment.

"Often as I git the chance. Gran'pa keeps me workin' most o' the time" —

"But you found time to build a big play-house I noticed below here; when did you do that?"

"Oh, odd spells," she answered proudly, tossing the last of the fish heads to the gulls. "It took me over a year. Ain't it a snug one?"

"It is, most certainly," he returned interested in the fact that this young lady, almost, should find enjoyment in such an occupation. "But what did you build it for, to kill time?"

The girl looked at him curiously. "No," she replied slowly, "I built it just to have some spot I could call my own and to sit in and think I was somebody else."

"And why do you want to think you are somebody else," he queried, watching her, "aren't you happy here?"

The tone, look, and question, each sympathetic, seemed to win more confidence.

"Happy!" she answered with an ironical accent, "yes so happy I'm almost tempted to jump into the ocean and drown myself sometimes, or run away. I'd 'a' done that long ago if I'd 'a' known some place I could earn my livin' at."

It was an impulsive burst of confidence quite surprising to Mark, like a plea for help, and he smiled into this serious, sun-tanned, child-woman face upraised to his, with almost pity. And in that moment — that meeting of eye with eye between these two, coupled with his compassionate smile — a mutual interest was born that cost her a thousand times more sorrow than she had ever known before, and him, the upsetting of all his life plans.

Then, too, at that instant he recalled all that the skipper had said of her and Cap'n Jud; his own impressions of that surly sea-dog and what that hid-away playhouse meant as well. And as one sees an entire landscape by a night-flash of lightning, so now Mark saw this girl's life and isolation, and its suddenness was as startling. He had supposed that this fisher-maid must be an ignoramus quite content with her humble lot, and here she was, a young goddess in form, a woman grown, who built a castle to read and dream day-dreams in while feeling herself a prisoner on this island. And then such books!

"I am not surprised," he answered, recovering himself and smiling again. "Your books and the playhouse told me you had aspirations beyond this island and that you must be lonely." The tone more than the words touched her.

"Oh, I am, sir," she returned eagerly, "so lonesome and miserable I sit in my little hut and cry sometimes. But I don't know how to get away. I have no one to help me do anything. I hate this island."

That "hate" included her grandfather Mark divined on the instant.

"But this island isn't all your life," he rejoined, "you must have some friends up at the village — Sandy Bay I believe it is — and you go to church there don't you?"

"I never went to church in my life," she answered bluntly, "Gran'pa wouldn't let me and I never had clothes fit. I hain't no friends there either. Only one girl and she isn't a — a good girl they say."

"But you went to school there," he queried in greater surprise; "what has become of all your schoolmates?"

"Oh they've all forgot me," she replied looking away, "they was told to, I s'pose."

Her life history was coming thick and fast now and Mark paused to follow it. The skipper's insinuation regarding her birth also recurred to him and the necessity of avoiding it as well.

"I presume you imagine that part," he said gently, after a pause, "and the real reason is that you keep away from them. Out of sight out of mind is the way the world over, they say. I think," he added encouragingly, "that a girl with romance enough to build a castle for herself and brains enough to read and enjoy Victor Hugo and Longfellow doesn't need schoolmate friends."

"But I'd like clothes fit to be seen in," she returned spiritedly, as if defending herself, "and I hain't any."

Mark glanced at the tight-fitting soiled and faded calico dress she wore, without collar or cuffs, the low hobbledehoy shoes reposing beside her on the rock, the soft brown hat near them and smiled.

"Oh, forget frocks," he said briskly, "and don't worry about your clothing so long as it keeps you warm. To the best of my observation, new gowns are so many pitfalls in a woman's life. First, they encourage their vanity, next, when outdone, excite their envy, and in the end bring humiliation. To me you look as well now as though dressed in silk."

"But I ought to look decent," she rejoined stoutly, "and not wear one dress till it drops off."

"As for that," Mark returned, smiling at the woman of it, "a wise man once said that to him who hath a pair of shoes it were as well as if the whole world were covered with leather. One dress is as good as two while it lasts, two gowns make you want the third, that will demand the fourth, and so on indefinitely."

"What you say about shoes is because I'm barefoot I guess," she responded, failing to follow his logic. "I took mine off to wade in the cove when I came here and feed my gulls. I'll put 'em on now," and she turned away to do so.

"Don't you want to see my flowers?" she said, rising when shod, and smiling like a child happy at finding a companion. "I've got a garden spot over back, and a lot of posies. I'll give you some."

"Most assuredly," he answered, also rising and more than ever interested in this odd girl. "And I want to see your playhouse again."

Her garden to which she now led him eagerly, was a four-rod-square patch of tilled soil in a narrow dingle, rock-bordered. A low fence of driven stakes and old black fish net enclosed it with a tiny lattice gate for entrance. Here in this plot grew a medley of the old-fashioned flowers Mark had first seen at Good Will Farm and these peonies, sweet williams, phlox, bachelor's buttons, and nasturtiums gave it a most contrasting glow of color. A row of hollyhocks opened their bright eyes along one side of the patch, another of sunflowers just across faced the afternoon sun, and morning glory vines almost hid the net fence. Collectively, it was a very charming beauty spot hid away amid the desolation of bare brown rocks. To add neatness, each of the four crossed walks in the garden were paved with small, sea-worn, beach stones. Like the playhouse, this garden must have cost her hundreds of hours' work.

"It is a more than pretty one, a perfect gem," Mark asserted, first surveying it then glancing at the girl, "and I don't see how you can be lonesome in summer anyway."

"But it only lasts for then," she answered pathetically, "and when the frost nips my posies I always have a crying spell. Winters here are almost horrible." Then as if no delay must hinder the offering of tribute to this first admirer and hero in her life, she entered the garden and began breaking off the choicest blossoms as if they were so many weeds.

"Don't pick many," Mark cautioned, "a flower plucked is a flower killed and I'd rather they were left for you to look at."

But she paid no heed to this request. In one short hour this stranger, this jaunty, smiling, suave, soft-spoken mature young man, had become almost deified in her eyes.

"How do you find time to do all this work and for that hut you built?" he queried, watching her.

"Oh, it hasn't seemed work," she returned smiling up at him from amid the flowers, "it's all been play spells to me, the only hours I've enjoyed, and what has kept me from going crazy." And once again the pathos of her solitary life recurred to him.

When her hands could hold no more of the blossoms she plucked so ruthlessly, she, as if divining his wishes led the way to her hut, dropped them on the greensward, brought out the old chair for him to sit in as if he were her guest and squatting on the grass began arranging her flowers. The little courtesy was noted by Mark, he said "Thank you," and then stood looking the unique structure over once more. And this time the countless hours she must have used in its construction, the pains to find so many stones of requisite size and shape, some of them all a man could lift, impressed him more than at first.

"How long were you building this hut, Myrtle?" he queried, and thus addressing her for the first time.

"It's four years since I began it," she responded in a tone of pride, "and I finished it last summer."

"And why did you build it, what do you do here?"

"Oh, to have a little spot, a shelter I could call my own. I come here to read, watch the ocean, and think I am somebody else and talk to the folks in my books. This and my garden are all I have in life."

Mark looked at her curiously a moment, and a pretty picture she was too in spite of her faded-out and somewhat soiled calico dress. Her face glowed with happiness, her eyes were wistful, her jet-black hair coiled neatly, was glossy in the sunlight, and her lips as scarlet as some of the flowers now in her lap. Just back of her also, and as if to accentuate the picture rose a low, gray, moss-coated wall of granite.

"How old are you, Myrtle?" Mark asked, now seating himself in the chair, "you seem quite a young lady."

"I—I don't know," she stammered in sudden confusion. "I'm 'most twenty I guess, or over eighteen anyway. Nobody ever told me."

"And you are not happy here, you say, in spite of your garden and playhouse, and want to run away, eh?" he continued. "Now tell me about your home life, and this old lady, your grandfather's sister, who brought you up, they say. Don't you get along with her?"

"Oh, Aunt Perth means to be good to me," she answered, half scornfully, "but she dassent. She don't dare say her soul's her own and Gran'pa hates me for a reason I can't tell you. I don't mind having to work," she added defiantly, "but I can't stand being hated and I never have any clothes fit to be seen in."

It was all plain enough now, this girl's pitiful history and the how and why of her desolate life. To make it all the harder, as Mark divined, she had been endowed with a poetic soul, a romantic nature that found companionship in a lonely hut and peace of mind in contemplation of the sad and solemn ocean. And more than ever now he began to pity her.

"I'm very sorry for you, little girl," he said, voicing it in a tender tone, "the tables of your life seem turned against you. I wish also I could advise and help you in some way. I will if I can."

Then it seemed to her as if a new door of hope had opened.

"Oh, you can, sir," she exclaimed anxiously, looking up at him, "you are rich I am sure, you have been all round and can tell some place I can go to and earn my living. That is all I want; just some one to advise me."

"Well, perhaps," he responded cautiously, conscious that he had provoked this dilemma, yet willing to face it, "I'll help you in any way I can only —"

"Only what?" she questioned as if her fate hung on his next words.

"Only, my dear girl," he resumed slowly, "to be the one to help you desert your home and go out into a cold and selfish world is assuming a good deal of risk you see."

"But it's all mine," she rejoined earnestly, "all I want is to be told where to go and earn my keep."

"And suppose that spot is one or two hundred miles away, what then? How will you get there?"

"I can walk, can't I," she declared eagerly, and then the courageous spirit so shown seemed pathetic. It was evident that she had reached an almost desperate frame of mind.

"Well, my dear girl," he responded slowly as if looking into her future, "I'll help you if you say you are absolutely determined to leave this island, but — I positively must not be known as doing so or it will ruin your good name."

"I know it," she answered coloring, "but I'll promise that no one shall find it out, for no one can unless I tell."

"And you will also have to let me loan you some money," he added wondering how that would strike her, "you can't go away without that?"

"I don't want to take money," she rejoined spiritedly, "all I want is some place to go to."

"But you must have money to go anywhere," he insisted, "I can find you some place to work but you couldn't walk to it and you also need a new dress, shoes, hat, lots of things I guess. No," he continued in paternal tone, "I'll help you Myrtle if you insist on leaving here but you must accept a loan and go at it in a sensible way."

Then she again looked up at him with eyes misty and like a dog's watching his master. The door of hope was now wide open and through it shone the light of a new life.

But to Mark it seemed as if he had just assumed ownership of a white elephant.

"Now that that point is settled," he continued feeling a mixed sensation of pride and new responsiblity, "I'll think the matter over and what I'd best do for you."

And now came an unexpected interruption for glancing out over the ocean the girl saw a boat far away. "There's Gran'pa coming home," she explained rising suddenly, "and I must go back now. And please won't you keep out of sight too, Mr. Mason," she added hurriedly, "follow the shore up this side of the island. If he sees you with me I'll get larruped."

"Why, of course," he rejoined, sorry for the sudden termination of a pleasant tête-á-tête, yet thus given another insight into this girl's life. "I'll keep out of sight and also meet you here to-morrow afternoon. I may also go to the village this evening for letters, maybe you can get a chance to meet me on my way back," and then rising he held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said, smiling into her anxious face, "and cheer up, you may be happy yet."

"Here are your flowers," she replied withdrawing her hand from his the instant she felt its clasp, and stooping, handed the enormous bouquet to him. "I shall meet you to-night if I can and come here to-morrow anyway," she added hastily, "so good-bye," and off she ran like a deer up the island.

He also and gallantly heeding this odd, ill-clad, winsome girl's request, followed the island shores around to within sight of the wharf and Cap't Jud, landing there. To go on and meet him while carrying the flowers would never do. To throw them away he couldn't, so he crouched behind a low spruce watching and waiting until the coast was clear and then pulled out to the yacht.

"Where did you get the bouquet?" Frank queried as he stepped aboard.

"Oh, I was over to the village," Mark answered, nonchalantly, "and made friends with a most charming old lady."

Some evasions become a matter of honor.

CHAPTER V

MYSTIC MOONSHINE

Mark Mason had reached thirty without suffering any serious heart troubles. Neither could it be said that he felt any extra emotion after his three-hour visit with this unique island girl. He did feel a good deal of pity, however, and some curiosity. Also surprise that she should have the courage and self-reliance disclosed by her intentions.

"Poor girl," he said to himself a dozen times after leaving her, "she hasn't the faintest idea what it means to go out into the world and earn an honest living. And her good looks will make that sort all the harder. There is about one chance in ten she may meet and marry some decent fellow and nine that she will wreck herself as her mother did and join the scarlet army."

But speculations of this sort are unwise for a heart-whole young man like Mark who means to remain so, and yet they kept recurring to him. The oftener they did recur, the more he felt the witchery of her appealing eyes and desire to aid and protect her. Then too the knight errant romance of it was attractive. He didn't mean to fall in love with her, however; oh no! He meant to remain as he was a free and untrammeled young bachelor. Still he could pity her all he chose, he was sure, help her as well — he was able — and having done so much in a fatherly sort of way leave her to carve her own destiny in life. All this was very nice and philanthropic he was sure — and it was. She most certainly needed help from some one — that was self-evident. And why not be the one to extend it? Risky, of course? Still that made it all the more attractive. Then to complicate matters the more he thought of this lone and lonely fisher-maid who built a playhouse to read and dream in, the more anxious he became to help her. It was easy also to get away from the yacht and meet her as planned. The "Injuns" who played poker incessantly had scant interest in him or he in them and so that evening he excused himself early and pulled ashore. No one was at the wharf when he landed. The makeshift character and fishy odor were more pronounced than ever and suggestive of ample reason why this girl must want to escape her slavery there as well. Mark drew his yawl out, and followed the grass-grown roadway up the inlet to the bridge connecting island and mainland where he had hoped to meet her. She was not there, however, and he halted to await her and look around. It was after sunset now. A late-rising moon just emerging from the scarce rippled ocean opened its broadening path of silver sheen to add romance. The air was balmy and odorous of bayberry bushes and the salty zest of the sea, while the murmur of wave-wash mingled with the gurgle of the tide beneath the bridge. A time, place, and impress; calm, sweet, and soothing. Only for a moment was Mark left to contemplate it alone, then a rustle was heard in a near-by clump of scrub spruce and Myrtle emerged.

"Hello, little girl," he exclaimed cheerily, "you certainly took me unawares popping this way out of the bushes like a fairy. But I am glad to see you."

"I've been waiting quite a spell," she admitted frankly, "and hid for fear some one else from your yacht might come."

"That was wise, my dear sprite," he returned nonchalantly, and in a mood for romantic speech. "I see I can trust your discretion. Now let us go on to the village," he added taking her arm to guide her up the stony path, "it's this way I suppose."

"Oh, I couldn't go quite there," she responded, catching step with him, "only to within sight of it and then I'll wait for you."

"Right you are again," he asserted well pleased by her confidence and slowing down his steps. "And we won't hurry either, it's too pleasant an evening. Did you get home safe this afternoon, or rather did anyone suspect you met me?"

"No I guess not," she responded grateful for this interest, "or Gran'pa would 'a' locked me up so I couldn't 'a' met you."

"And you wanted to, I assume?" glancing at her.

"You asked me to," she returned naïvely looking away, "and I — I never had no one take any interest in me before."

"Of course I did, my dear girl," he responded gallantly, "and I should have been much disappointed had you failed to come. I've thought of you all the time since we parted and made up my mind to help you. Only we must go about it discreetly and you must never, never, let your people even guess I did so."

"I wouldn't tell if Gran'pa killed me," she returned resolutely and with a grateful glance at him, "I won't never tell nobody, not a word."

"And now, Myrtle," he continued in a business tone, "what can you do and where do you want to go?"

"I don't care where I go so long as its a good ways from here, or what I do," she responded courageously. "All I want is a chance to earn my living."

"That's the right spirit, but this world is a very cold, selfish, and merciless one and you must face loneliness, danger, and many pitfalls. I don't imagine you know much about it."

"I don't know anything," she admitted candidly, "for I've never been beyond Sandy Bay. I'm not afraid, however, so long as I can earn my keep. I won't stay here much longer anyway."

Then Mark began to give this matter some serious thought for a peculiar problem faced him. He was willing to help her, meant to. He was ready to loan her money, not even caring or expecting it to be returned, but take her where he might, locate her as he could, she would still be on his hands and he knew very well that he couldn't then desert her and leave her to shift for herself. And so the white elephant aspect of this proposition began to assume large proportions. And yet, here she was, grateful to be walking beside him, sure he was going to help her and ready to accept any plan he proposed. And now having once promised to aid and befriend her he wasn't the man to back out, never, never!

"Well, little girl," he said finally, "I am going to do as I said and help you away from Folly Island and to find some respectable employment. Just where or what I can't now make up my mind and must think it over. I want you to meet me to-morrow afternoon at your playhouse — if you can safely — and meantime I'll hit on some feasible plan for you. I presume house or table work or a mill will be about what you will have to accept."

" I'll be satisfied with either," she responded gratefully, " and it will be ten times better than the fish house and being hated."

" I shall have to keep watch over you," he resumed, smiling at her, " be a sort of father as it were and see you don't come to want or elope with some rapscallion of a fellow. You mustn't do that anyway."

And then her heart leaped with a new and wondrous joy for this was more than she had even hoped for. And so grateful was she that she bit her lips to keep back the tears.

" You are very good," she responded, trying to steady her voice, " and I can never thank you enough. I will always do just what you say I shall, and — and I am so happy."

At the hilltop overlooking Sandy Bay he halted. " Now, little girl," he said gently, " you wait here for me and I'll go on and get my mail. It's not best for you to be seen with me, as you inferred, and I'll hurry back."

And he did too, not even pausing to exchange a word with Amos Orton at the store, except to ask for letters and buy a box of candy for the waiting girl. She was nestled beside a rock on the hill watching the wide moonlit ocean when he returned, and as she rose to meet him a look of newborn hope lit up her face and big wistful eyes.

"Was I gone long?" he asked, smiling at her, for despite her pinching dress ready to burst from the rounded form within, and the soft hat in her hand she was undeniably handsome there in the moonlight.

"It seemed a long time," she responded softly, "but I was willing to wait."

And so she was willing to wait, to do, to dare, to risk anything for just a word or smile from this, the first and only hero who had ever entered her life!

"Well," he said half conscious of this and taking her arm again, "now we will go back. I presume you feel you mustn't stay out late?"

"I dassent," she admitted almost trembling, "Gran'father would kill me if he knew where I was."

"Oh, don't be so afraid of that cussed brute," Mark blurted out, "for he is a brute to treat you so. I saw him throw the bloody fish at you this morning, heard what he said, and it's that that's made me offer to help you. Of course," he added less sharply, "it's not best for him to know we met and you are wise to be careful."

At the bridge he halted again and now another complication occurred to Mark. "Suppose you can't meet me to-morrow," he said; "what then? When and where can I see you?"

"Oh I'll find a way somehow," she returned buoyantly, "Gran'pa goes off fishing 'most every afternoon and if he don't I can come here in the evening."

"Do you go to the village often and get letters there?" he continued, thinking beyond her. "I shall have to write, you see, when I find the right place for you."

"I never got a letter in my life," she admitted, candidly, "but I will go there now and ask for them. You ain't a-going away very soon," she added anxiously, "not for a few days, are you?"

"No, I presume not, but I can't say. I am only a guest on my friend's boat and when he says 'go,' go I must."

That question and response was the first mutual admission of the new bond between them. She was not conscious of it as yet, only that this unexpected friend and gallant hero had in six hours become a protector and means of escaping her hated life here.

But Mark, quicker to catch the meaning of words, divined on the instant how she felt.

"You mustn't let my going away discourage you, my dear girl," he said consolingly. "I shall do as I say, find you a place to go to and after that still remain your friend and adviser."

"I — I wish you — you could meet me soon after I go away," she stammered conscious only of her own helplessness but not thinking how much she was trusting this man. "I guess you wouldn't want to, though," she added on second thought. "You'd be ashamed of me."

"No, it isn't that, Myrtle," he returned soberly, "I have no foolish pride of that sort, only this world always thinks evil first and good later — maybe, and my escorting you to some place you were to live in would inevitably harm your good name and that mustn't happen. My aid and protection must be given by letter."

"I didn't think of that," she answered turning away.

And now the weird mysticism of a moonlight ocean murmuring adown the rock-ribbed shores of Folly Island lifted Mark above minor concerns and this girl's needs.

"Do you know, Myrtle, such an evening as this is one to be long remembered," he said, first glancing at her leaning on the bridge rail beside him, then out upon the ocean. "Also one that you and I both will recall many times. It is like a promise of peace in a troubled life, a new world altogether fascinating, weird, and alluring. It makes me forget this one, money-making, and selfish humanity; and when I look out upon that path of silver light I follow it into an unknown realm."

"I've felt so, too," she answered less poetically, "and all the pleasant hours I've had were those down at my playhouse watching the ocean. I always go there mooonlight nights to sit and think. Sometimes I feel very happy doing so, then get blue and have a crying spell. And once I fell asleep there and didn't wake up till 'most morning. Gran'pa thinks I am there now," she added returning to the one ogre of her life, "or else I wouldn't have dared come here."

"And you read your books there I suppose?" he queried, again glancing at this odd girl. "Don't they make you forget your troubles?"

"Oh, yes, always, only when I finish one I feel more lonesome, just as if my book friends had gone away. And then they are such nice people, too, always so kind and loving to one another, most of them anyway, and the ladies all have nice dresses and are so handsome. I talk to them, too, like they was real ones," she added eagerly, "and tell 'em how lucky they are and how sorry I am when they have trouble. Then sometimes I think they are near me creeping around among the rocks or back of my hut, a whispering. It's the breeze or the water I know but it sounds like voices."

"Well you are a romantic girl," Mark ejaculated in surprise, "and a bit poetic as well. I don't wonder you hate your life here and the fish house."

"Oh, I don't mind the work part," she returned hurriedly, "I am perfectly willing to work hard all day. Its only because I am hated I want to go away. Its awful hard to feel you are hated all the time."

Then Mark scanned her face curiously, conscious also of an increasing interest. In fact she had from the very outset been a surprise and now was more so than ever. And her face, animated as it was by this burst of confidence, with eyes tender in the moonlight was a very winsome one. Never in all his life had he seen one quite like it, or a girl so utterly innocent and confiding as she was. A perfect child-woman in fact, unconscious of evil, poetic in thought, romantic by nature.

"I understand you now," he asserted finally, voicing this, "and that you must leave Folly Island or grow more unhappy day by day." Then the business side of this conclusion recurred to him as was natural, and he drew forth a pocket book. "Here is fifty dollars," he added, counting it out, "and my card. Hide both where no one can possibly find them, go to the post office three or four days after I leave here and follow the directions I shall write you."

"Oh, I don't want to take the money," she replied quickly, "I can never pay it back, and in one of my books it says a girl must never take money from a man not related to her."

"But you must this time," he returned imperatively, "it's a loan you can feel you are to pay back sometime, and you can't get away without it you know. Now you must do as I say, for I cannot help you unless you do."

Then hestitating a moment yet, she finally took the money from Mark's hand and thrust it into the bosom of her dress. Little did he then realize how sacred an obligation this now became to her, or how she would — and did in time — face starvation rather than fail to return it.

"And now, Myrtle," he continued nonchalantly, and smiling, "you must think and feel I am your big brother and going to take good care of you, as I shall. Meet me at your playhouse to-morrow afternoon, or here in the evening as best you can, only be careful no one suspects what's afoot, and never mention my name to a living soul until I say you can. Now I guess it's time for you to go home."

And then, with so much settled in this unique and unusual pact, he locked his arm in hers — as a lover would — and led her from the bridge.

At the parting of their ways he halted and then a quite natural temptation came to him. In a way she was pledged to him he felt, her future, at least for a time, and her good name as well. Him, she had taken for adviser, friend, and helper, to do as he said and trust him implicitly. All this she had accepted without question. And now she was beside him in the narrow bush-bordered path with only the moon for observer and they about to part!

And why not part as youthful man and maid when lovers ever do? That she must be willing he felt on the instant. And her lips were very tempting!

But somehow her utter faith and simple innocence had thrown a mantle about her, a veil invisible, that Mark, lofty in honor, could not now draw aside.

"Good night, my dear," he said gently, overcoming the insidious temptation as few men could, "and dream of happier days to come. I'll see you to-morrow." Then he strode away.

And watching him leave, back to her when he was half way to the wharf came the sweet refrain of "My Old Kentucky Home" softly whistled by him.

But sleep was not for her as yet, for when she reached her poor little room she knelt on the bare floor at her one small window, to watch the yacht, still alight out on Folly Cove, and peep into the new world of hope now opened to her.

And just then she would — if she could — have kissed the hand that opened its door, even as a dog would caress its master's.

CHAPTER VI

THE POWER OF HOPE

Myrtle was up and about her duties next morning as usual and as early, which was soon after daylight. She helped about breakfast-getting — the fetching of water, fire-building, cooking and dish-washing — the same morning monotony, also as usual without a word from old Aunt Perth or surly Cap'n Jud. Then once more to the fish house of vile odor and the spreading of pickled fish.

The sun came up blistering hot, the flies swarmed as always there in summer, the smells increased or grew worse, and the first word Cap'n Jud addressed to her was a grunted command. The gulls came again as he began to split fish once more, a breeze rippled into Folly Cove, and the day began as all summer ones did.

And yet not this one for her, for now a new life far away from this hated and hateful one was ahead of her, soon to be entered, and she was to escape this unhappy, lonely, lonesome, and altogether wretched one.

The crates of fish were as heavy as usual but she lifted them with a new buoyant strength. The flies pursued and bit her but she felt them not. Her pitiful garb grew brine-soaked but she knew it not. Cap'n Jud even cursed her for pausing to look at the yacht outside, but she heard him not or scarcely — for on that beautiful, white, graceful craft, whose burnished rails were like gold in the morning sun — was one who was to rescue her from this horrible despicable life and soon, too!

And then cheered by this new hope and expectation, brighter and better things recurred to her. She heard birds singing in the bushes across the cove, the crisp sea breeze replaced the fish-house odor, the monotone of the ocean seemed a soothing, sweet melody and the gulls to be trying to talk to her. Two, four, six hours of this hard-worked life, passed as one hour to her, noon and dinner came, then the turning of fish on the racks as Cap'n Jud — much to her satisfaction — launched his dory and pulled away. And now she hurried through her remaining work as never before, hastened to her room to wash and don her one best and only summer dress, a calico one, and still watching the yacht furtively — as she had all that morning, she stole away down to the point and her playhouse.

And Mark also watchful that day saw all this.

But he as well, felt that caution was obligatory on him now, and after asserting that he needed exercise and a swim also, got into his yawl and — to deceive the "Injuns"— pulled through the inlet and around the further shore of Folly Island, out of sight of them and down towards the point. To surprise the girl he knew was awaiting him there he landed just above it in the cove where she had fed the gulls, and crept along the beach until he was opposite her hut and gazed stealthily over the low cliff shore. She was there on a rock near her playhouse intently watching up the island; a few flowers pinned to the bosom of her dress, one open rose in her coils of jet-black hair and evidently — as Mark noted,— arrayed as best she could to receive him. He noticed also a freshly gathered bouquet from her garden on the box in her playhouse.

"Good afternoon, Miss Baldwin," he said thus accosting her and smiling, as he saw her start, turn to him on the instant, and blush red as the rose in her hair.

"I was looking for you up the island," she admitted springing to her feet, "and was afraid you wasn't coming."

"Oh, I keep my promises always, if I possibly can," he asserted in his positive way, "and now how are you? I saw you working all the morning and also start for here an hour ago."

"You did," she returned naïvely and coloring again, "I couldn't see you on your boat, though I looked whenever I got the chance."

"Well I was there in a hammock reading and keeping watch of you as well. Was it all right last night when you got home? No kicks, eh?"

"No, they were asleep," she answered innocently, "and I was so happy I sat by my window a long time watching your boat, till after midnight I guess."

"So far so good," Mark asserted, smiling—"and now let's sit down in the shade of your castle and have a nice visit."

She obeyed, ready now to obey even his lightest wish; he lit a cigar, stretched himself beside her and puffed away a few moments in silence. Somehow too this girl's ready obedience, her naïvete, her blind faith in him now seemed very consoling. She at first had appeared like a white elephant on his hands; now he was glad he had undertaken her guidance and almost felt a sense of proprietorship in her. In a way she was his to direct, he realized; she certainly had placed her fate and future in his hands; blindly, almost, and implicitly beyond question! And why not?

She was in nowise to blame for this faith, either, as he now knew, for she had no parent to gainsay it, she was here on sufferance and hated in the bargain; Cap'n Jud would most likely feel "good riddance" when she left, Aunt Perth didn't count, and the best outcome for her was what she now planned to do. Then Mark's own past — and similar history — recurred to him as he smoked and stole a sly glance at the girl not ten feet away. He had never confided it to anyone, it was a sealed book, but now, somehow, the impulse came to him to tell it all to her.

"Myrtle," he said suddenly, drawing himself up and leaning against the hut, "I told you last night I was going to be your friend and big brother, and help you, and I am. You trust me also without question and I shall never go back on that faith or be anything else except your good friend. I know your history, how you came here and all that makes you unhappy. In a way, also, we are brother and sister in misfortune and now I am going to tell you why."

And tell it all he did from the very first day he began to guess his parentless, deserted position at the asylum, then to Good Will Farm and life there, and then out into the great world with all his fight for a livelihood and final success. It took two hours in the telling, held her spell-bound all that time, as indeed it must do, and when he finished she turned to him with a tender, almost loving look and made an odd answer.

"Gran'pa says there is no such thing as God," she said, "only luck and the devil. My books say there is a God and I am going to believe it was Him that made you come here to help me. And I am so glad for what you've told me, too, and — and your being so, and sorry for me makes me so happy."

It was an incoherent response but Mark understood it. Also that now, so complete was her faith in him, were he to open his arms and say "Be my wife," she would spring into them as a tortured soul would leap into Heaven if the door were opened.

But Mark was not quite ready for that as yet. This girl was crude, untutored, of necessity lacking polish; the wonder to him was why she was not more so. On the other hand, she was alluring, handsome, courageous, self-reliant, and blindly confiding. All this he had seen or now realized; and deep in his heart he half felt that the "Be my wife" outcome would yet rise to his lips. But not yet, oh no! Only to be her good friend and help her for the present.

It was not many days ere he repented his cold calculations and missed opportunities.

"I am very glad you feel so, Myrtle," he now said emerging from his trance. "There most certainly is a God who watches over us, and maybe He sent me ashore to see you abused and offer my aid. You are sure of it anyhow, and I'm glad I can help you. And now, my dear sister," he added buoyantly, "I've mapped out my — our plans a little clearer, I shall go away from here in a day or two, maybe quit the yacht here, possibly I may go to Good Will and consult Mr. Hinckley, and as soon as I've decided what to do for you, or with you, I shall write to you. Now there is another matter you must consider. When you leave here it is for good; you can never return. There is no one you can confide in, in fact, you must not in any one, so it is best and for your good name to go away at night and in such manner that your people here, and Sandy Bay, will believe you have drowned yourself. It's not a nice thing to do, but I believe it's best for you."

"I will do as you say in all things," she returned trustfully, "I've no friend but you now. I shall see you soon though, won't I?" she added anxiously. "You will send for me in a few days won't you?"

"As soon as I find the right place to locate you in, and I think also you had better adopt another name after you leave so your escape can never be learned here. How would — Iva Stone suit you?"

he continued, after a pause and glance at a green-clad rock near by. "It's odd and pretty — like you — and I want to separate you from Folly Island and this life absolutely and forever. I must give you a little more money, too," he added, glancing at the sun now well down. "I shall try to see you this evening at the bridge but something may happen to prevent and I want to feel you are well provided for running away, anyhow."

"But I won't need it," she urged, "and I may lose it."

"No you won't, my dear," he returned, bluntly, "you are too wise for that. Keep it hid till you go, and then put it in the bosom of your dress. When I meet you," he added encouragingly, "I'll buy you a pocket book and lots of things you need."

He had promised this helpless waif his aid and friendship and that to him meant the free use of his pocket book and thought as well.

"I'm going to give you fifty dollars more," he continued after rising and consulting his watch, "and then I must be going. It is a half-hour's pull back for me and almost supper time." Then he counted out that sum and handed to her.

"Can't you wait while I run over to my garden and pick you some flowers?" she asked wistfully, anxious to reward this hero somehow. "It won't take me a minute."

"No thank you, Iva," he answered smiling at her, "let them live and grow and enjoy sunshine. And now I think that you, too, must hurry home so there won't be any suspicion and you are more likely to get out a few moments this evening and meet me." Then he held out his hand at parting, said "Good bye, sister Iva," nonchalantly and was off to his boat with but one glance backward and a tip of his cap before he vanished over the low cliff.

And somehow Myrtle, left alone beside her little playhouse, felt as if her heart was in that dainty yawl fast growing smaller up the shore of Folly Island; and all her hope, her very life even, in the keeping of him who pulled it. Then, too, Mark's hasty departure, his brusque refusal of her proffered flowers, and nonchalant leave-taking also hurt her, for she was unused to men's ways. And something else hurt as well.

She had never been sought or wooed by men; to her they were as yet an enigma. But the intuition of sex was in her, her books had described the raptures of love, she had proffered her very soul, almost, to this man, he had praised her, some by word and more by look, and yet; when she knew her utter faith and almost adoration must have been noticed by him, were his to claim if he chose, he had coolly ignored her mute offering and left her with just an off-hand "good-bye."

Little did she realize how hard a struggle Mark had had, *not* to accept what he saw in her eyes, *not* to utter the sweet nothings gallants ever do, or like them, kiss and pet her for momentary amusement with no care for its outcome.

CHAPTER VII

THE TWO SIDES OF LOVE

Mark Mason was a practical, common-sense man, with only a tinge of romance in him. His first impulse in life had been to make money in order to be independent of all and feel so. This perhaps arose from his orphaned start in the world and its humiliation. His first thought also toward this waif had been to provide her with the means of escape from her pitiful condition; next to secure some respectable employment for her, in short, obtain for her what he most craved for himself — independence. The matter of sex and love impulse was a minor one, interesting him only in a casual way; and while he pitied her deeply on sight, almost; was ready to give her one hundred or one thousand dollars if need be, and much time and thought as well; to marry her was quite beyond him.

But love is an illusion that creeps upon us unawares and like the drink habit. One sip tempts to another, two more make us crave a continuation, and so on until all life and ambition seem to center upon one person.

To Mark in the romantic nook where Myrtle had built her playhouse; with the added charm of isolation and wave-washed shore; she was, despite her raiment, a sweet and fascinating maid. This new hope filled her appealing eyes with wondrous tenderness, her every word and glance bespoke admiration and faith in this hero, and he saw it all. In a way it was very pleasing to him, as it ever is to any man, and when he left her — rather abruptly as was his way — the impress of her eyes pursued him to the yacht. And even here the ribald badinage, jokes, and jests of his erstwhile friends were not enough to dispel it. More than that, these seemed almost offensive now and quite out of harmony with the idyllic hours just passed. He stole away again soon after sunset, using the excuse of letters expected at Sandy Bay, and halting only to glance at the makeshift wharf and old wreck protecting it, hurried on up to the bridge half hoping Myrtle would be there. She was not, however, and for the first time a wee tinge of disappointment came to Mark. He waited here what seemed a half-hour — it actually was ten minutes — and then strode on over to Sandy Bay. There was no mail for him, he didn't expect any in fact — and his sole reward was to be stared at by the knot of loungers in Orton's store and forced to parry a few almost impertinent questions from that inquisitive Yankee.

And be it said here, that group already knew how many composed the yachting party, and surmised that Mark had made the acquaintance of "Cap'n Jud's gal" also, and had bought candy for her the evening previous.

He escaped the store soon as possible and returning was almost back to the bridge when Myrtle popped out of the bushes and met him.

And this time he felt his heart give one throb of satisfaction.

"You are a sly little elf," he said coming up to her, "Why did you hide in the bushes again?"

"Because I wasn't sure it was you," she answered directly, "and you told me to be careful. I didn't want to meet nobody else. I saw you go over and have been waiting ever since."

"And your — Cap'n Jud, supposes you are at your playhouse now, doesn't he?" queried Mark smiling at her.

"I guess so, I went down that way first to fool him, and sneaked back on the shore. He knows I am at the playhouse a lot."

"And what would he say and do if he was to meet us now," Mark continued, clasping her arm with an ownership manner and starting for the bridge.

"Why, he'd cuss some and larrup me afterwards," she asserted positively, "but I hope he won't."

At the bridge he halted to glance over the moonlit sea and then turned to Myrtle. "How long can you stay out safely?" he asked, "and is Cap'n Jud liable to go hunting for you?"

"He wouldn't care if I never come back. Only if he saw you with me he'd make an awful fuss. He thinks all men are bad and — and there is a reason for it."

Mark didn't pursue the subject for he, too, surmised the reasons for this peculiar condition.

"Well, it will end soon, in four or five days," he continued soberly, "and for both our sakes, as I said, you must go in such a way that they will think you have ended your life. It's quite an undertaking for you will have to leave here in the night, go to the railroad — its about ten miles I'm told — and follow that to some station and take a train. You mustn't do it at the Sandy Bay one. I've thought this all out you see, Iva," he added, smiling at her again, "and it's going to take courage."

"I know it," she returned hesitatingly, "but — but couldn't you meet me at the next station from

Sandy Bay? I don't know how far that is, I was never up to the railroad even?"

And now the almost desperation of this plan recurred to him. Also that he, as adviser and protector of this hapless waif, was suggesting what few girls would have courage to undertake. And yet he saw no other way of escape without compromising both.

"I hate to have you do this, little girl," he said gently, after thinking the matter over, "but I see no other way. Go alone you must, or I be charged with abduction and your name sullied. This is the plain fact of the matter and no evading it. That's why I say they must be made to think you have committed suicide."

"I know it," she faltered, "and I am willing to go that way. I ain't afraid of the dark, or if I go soon the moon will help me some. Only," she added pleadingly, "if you was going to meet me at the station I wouldn't mind so much."

"I shall meet you at a point further on," he returned encouragingly, "and take care of you after that." He never once thought now how this part of the plan — it's one weak link — would fail him and her and bring about a most pitiful complication.

"And now I'll explain my own plans," he continued. "Frank is going off for a day's cruise to-morrow and I must go also, but I shall try to meet you here in the evening again, however. I think he will sail for the city next day and I may go with him or else, as I said, take the train and go to Good Will to see Mr. Hinckley. In either case I shall find some place for you within a week and write you. I may do so sooner."

And even now it did not occur to him, shrewd business man that he was, that this plan of notification by letter and meeting of this girl, totally unused to rail travel, was an almost idiotic one, and might fail to connect. He had thought of her good name and how to protect it, her certain need of money and how to keep it safe, but not of the risk of a letter going astray, or how she, never having seen a train of cars even, might take the wrong one or go in the wrong direction. She thought of these things, however, but was too proud or unwilling to show timidity, to speak of them.

"I will do just as you say," she now said obediently, "and Mr. Orton will give me your letter, I guess. Will it be to my right name?"

"Why, of course," he returned in surprise. "'Miss Myrtle Baldwin, Sandy Bay,' and remember don't lose my card in case anything happens, or your money. I shall probably write you to meet me at B. Junction, on the morning train from Sandy Bay and after that you needn't worry."

A nice, plain, off-hand, easy plan to a man like Mark accustomed to travel; but foolish one for Myrtle, whose life and world had been bounded by Folly Island and Sandy Bay!

And now glancing at the somewhat worried face beside him Mark realized more than ever how almost desperate a step she was planning, or rather he for her. Also the courage needful to undertake it.

"I wish I dared meet you at Sandy Bay, or even at its railroad station," he continued, "but it would absolutely ruin your name as you must see. I am also aware that it will try your nerves to face ten or perhaps fifteen miles of lonely, woodsy roads, at night, and you mustn't go through Sandy Bay either. Once you reach the railroad the rest is easy, however. Just follow it to a station, keep shady till a west-bound train comes along, jump aboard, pay your fare to B. to the conductor and I'll look out for you there."

It seemed a little easier now to poor untravelled Myrtle who hated to admit her complete ignorance, and she looked up and smiled into this hero's face with hopeful gratitude. And in that glance was assurance that she had now confided to him her future, her name, her honor, her life almost! And so she had!

Then another risk she was to face in her new life occurred to Mark, who, despite his many excellent attributes, was like all his class fond of talking and prone to give advice.

"I think, my dear girl," he now added, "we'd best sit down for I've something else to tell you," and having led her to a convenient bank beside the bridge he began it.

"You are, I am aware," he continued, "a rather romantic young girl who has never come in contact with the world in any manner at all. You know a few people at Sandy Bay no doubt; simple fisher folk who are not much better informed; you have read a curious medley of books, some of them, those of one author especially, of no benefit and possible harm; and from these you have obtained a highly colored fictitious and sentimental idea of love and the relations of men and women. In some of these books you have read men are portrayed as either almost God-like or fiends incarnate. Worse than that, they have assured you — I speak plainly — that amours, intrigues, and seduction, are the chief end and aim of even the noblest heroes, which is a base libel on the majority of men. The heroines are as distorted, either immaculate angels of superhuman fortitude, or else women absolutely without honor. Some of the other books are not much better, less sentimental but equally false and overdrawn so far as love is concerned. To overbalance this you have read a few books whose ideals are the purest and noblest possible to conceive, and well worthy of emulating. But collectively you have obtained an overdrawn and false idea of the world's people. Now you are going out into the world, a handsome young girl, innocent, untutored, and confiding. This I know by the way you have trusted me on sight, almost. Now men are not all base, yet most of them are attracted by a pretty face at once and two-thirds of them, given even a shade of encouragement, will pursue it for absolutely selfish and carnal reasons. You will meet them everywhere, they will begin to flatter you with almost the first words they utter, will keep it up so long as they see it is making the least impression, and all for the same end and purpose; no benefit to you. You, on the other hand, needing friends (if ever a poor, hapless girl did, you do), and half scared of the new world you are in, will insensibly trust all who speak fair and will surely find yourself mistaken in so doing. And so I warn you now, never trust any flattering words or men who dole them out to you one moment, never, never, never! Not all men are of evil intention, however. A few may and will flatter you just to make you feel good, as it were, and mean well. Also, and so long as you respect yourself and your own dignity, they will respect you.

"Now, on the other hand, you will find women, younger ones especially, are by nature your enemies solely from jealousy. They will criticise your dress, your speech, your manners, your conduct more particularly, without mercy and for the reason that all women with even a tithe of beauty consider a possibly better-looking one a competitor in the attraction of men. To this end and for this reason your conduct toward men will be the one thing they will sneer at first, last, and always, without charity or even justice. Middle-aged or married women have less of this sex-animosity and more charity. Some of them may prove real, sincere, kindly friends, and well worthy of confidence but beware of the young and good-looking ones, never give them a chance to suspect you to be anything but a good, modest girl, or they will tear you limb from limb, as it were, behind your back.

"Knowing this as I do — and I have observed womankind critically for many years — I realize I must find you some family where you can have a sort of home protection and motherly care. Also at the same time earn your living. I mentioned mill work to you yesterday but on second thought that is a slavery worse than your life here and won't do at all. Again your lack of education — I mean it without offense — will prevent your obtaining any except menial employment at first. Later you may find something better, maybe. And here again I have a hard task, for to obtain your admission into a home fit for you I must do it without compromising you in any way. If I were a little older I might pose as your uncle, as it is I can't and must be very diplomatic and cautious. I think I can bring it about, however."

"I don't know how I can pay you for all you are doing for me," Myrtle interrupted, sadly, "or ever earn enough to give you back your money. I won't spend a penny I'm not obliged to, anyways." Then she glanced out over the wide undulating ocean and its moonlit path and sighed. "I guess you'd best give it up," she added after a pause, "and I'll stay here. I've got used to being hated now and some day I may die. I did want to run away, but now you have discouraged me." Then she bit her lips and swallowed a sob.

"Nonsense," returned Mark bluntly. "I don't care a picayune for the money or ten times the amount, and never expect you will pay it back or want you to. As for the rest, it's a mere nothing for me to do, for I've had harder problems to solve in my life, and did it, too. All I meant was to warn you of what you must expect in the world." And now once more looking slyly at the girl beside him, a dejected, forlorn figure, with face in hands and looking oceanward, he again felt an almost resistless impulse to clasp her in his arms, say "Be my wife little girl, I'll take care of you," and thus cut the Gordian knot by tying another one.

But he didn't.

Instead, and out of the fullness of his heart, he gave her more encouragement. "I don't want you to feel obligated to me one iota," he said buoyantly, "for you are not. We are two parentless waifs in this world, brother and sister as I feel and said to you, and to-night, now, I thank God I came here and found you. Also that I can, as I shall, stand by you and land you in a better life and some sunshine. I mean it with all my heart and soul, so cheer up, little girl, you may be happy yet."

And at that moment to poor despised Myrtle Baldwin, the waif of Folly Island, it seemed as if God had spoken words of consolation, aye, held out the hand of rescue to her! One look, too, she gave Mark at this moment, a quick flash of mute adoration, and soulful gratitude such as a dog sometimes gives his master. But not a word. She dared not trust words now, her heart was too full for that.

And then; just at this moment of soul renunciation, this instant when to be clasped in his arms would be to enter Heaven; it came to her that she was unfit for that honor. That this hero, while a new kind friend (brother as he claimed), wanted no more than obedience from her and not love, her body and soul. And now somehow a shame for, and detestation of her own heart-craving came to her, and her face and neck grew crimson. She had no beauty in her own eyes or pride in it. To herself she was an ill-clad, shamefully born, ignorant, and despised creature not fit for this god-like hero in any way. A much-soiled drudge as he had seen her to be, and so despicable as to be insulted before his very eyes as she had been. Mark — preoccupied in thought at this moment and watching the moonlit ocean — also gave her another suggestion in this line by his manner so expressive of indifference. Twice before he had said first "It's time for you to leave me," and recalling this with all else that made her blush she sprang to her feet.

"I guess I'd better go home now," she said directly, "it's getting late and if Gran'father wakes up when I go in — you know what I'll get." And

Mark consulting his watch gave a low whistle for it was almost midnight.

"I guess you had," he asserted, innocent of all her self-reproaches, "I don't want you to have trouble. I'll see you in the afternoon to-morrow, or in the evening here. Or, if I don't, then watch for a letter." And locking his arm in hers, lover-like again, he led her down the path.

"Good-night, my dear," he said tenderly, when the parting moment came with its kiss-inspiring allurement, "and remember all I've told you." Then with another "Good-night, sweet dreams, little girl," he strode away.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MISFORTUNE OF CHANCE

What the plans of mice may be none can tell, but those of men and women, too, are as elusive as their shadows. Mark Mason's were so at least, for when he parted from the girl his heart had grown so tender towards that never-to-be-forgotten moonlit eve, he surely expected to meet her again either the next afternoon or evening. But he did not.

To begin with, Frank, as expected, decided the next morning to take a run seaward and visit a far-out island and Mark perforce felt obliged to go also. This island upon which two score or more fisher-folk dwelt in even greater simplicity than those of Sandy Bay; with its turkey-coop houses; its cliff-like shores, sentinel lighthouse, and pitiful make-shift of ways and means kept the party interested until late in the afternoon. On the return Frank concluded again to anchor in Folly Cove, and so at almost sunset Mark once more found himself scanning the island where his new protégé lived, and regretting that he had been unable to meet her at her unique playhouse. The evening tryst was possible, however, and at just dusk and again availing himself of the excuse to visit Sandy Bay to obtain mail he rowed ashore. This time also for occult reasons of his own he landed in a small cove on the mainland above and opposite Cap'n Jud's wharf and striking across the rock-ribbed, bush-grown upland, reached Sandy Bay thus circuitously. Here again his plans of returning in time to keep the second appointment were all upset, by a late train and breakdown of Barney's worn-out carryall, and it was after nine before Mark obtained the letters he really expected this time, and started for Folly Island. The moon, now four days past its full, was just rising when he reached the hilltop where he could see the bridge and here he halted his rapid steps and stood transfixed. And well he might, for there on the bridge below, scarce forty rods away stood the girl he wanted to meet and beside her — Frank!

He could see them both plain enough in the moonlight.

Myrtle was leaning over the rail, with her face turned away from her companion, while he was evidently pouring into her ear all the sweet flatteries Mark knew him to be past-master of. Mark would have scorned to be an eavesdropper or spy upon any one, but the wave of mingled chagrin, anger, jealousy, wrath almost, that now surged over his feelings held him spell-bound. Then suddenly the two figures seemed to merge into one for an instant, to separate as quickly, and the girl darted from the bridge and ran down the road like a scared deer.

And never in his life before had Mark felt so sudden a sense of satisfaction as at this moment! His next act was to squat down and watch the discomfited Frank follow the road back to the landing and not once did Mark lose sight of him until he reached it and pulled away for the yacht. Then Mark, inspired by a ray of hope that the girl would try once more to meet him descended to the bridge, lit a cigar, and for one long impatient hour waited and watched for her in vain. By this time also it had dawned on him that this fisher-maid of faultless form, and grotesque raiment; for whom he had opened his heart a little and pocket-book more; had become of unexpected value to him. To wait longer was hopeless, however, and so he retraced his steps up the hill and across lots to his boat. And now it seemed as if all manner of petty vexations came his way for he blundered into thickets of Mohawk briars every rod or two, missed his footing twice in the dubious moonlight and went sprawling among the rocks and when, scratched, bruised, and mad all over, he reached his boat the falling tide had left it two rods from the water with consequent injury to trousers and shoes when launching it.

"Well, you look as if you'd been digging clams and mad enough to eat 'em, shells and all," was Frank's salutation when Mark entered the cabin where the party was as usual playing poker. "What kept you so long?"

"Waiting for the mail," Mark growled, "and to save distance I rowed up the coast and left my boat nearer Sandy Bay; I found her two rods out of water on a mud bank."

For a moment Frank eyed him keenly, then a diabolical grin spread over his face. "Tried to be real foxy, old man, didn't you?" he said sauvely, "but you got left. We found out all about this Cap'n Jud's gal last night over at Sandy Bay — the one you've been after ever since we got here, so you might as well own up."

Mark glanced from one to another of the group who were now all watching him but his face gave no sign.

"Oh, it's all right, my dear fellow," Frank continued, winking at the rest, "for she's a stunner with lips like two cherries. Had a date with her at the bridge too, didn't you, so she told me? But I got there first and cut you out. Also a nice hug and kiss to pay for being on time. She said she had waited for you long enough."

It was vicious, even merciless raillery, and false every word of it as Mark knew full well, and his first impulse was to say "You lie," and tell of the scene he had witnessed. But caution and protection for this girl prevailed.

"You grow positively more and more addle-pated every day, Frank," he said instead, "and your parents ought to put you in a sanitarium. Of course I've seen this young lady of the island and so might you if you hadn't been poker-mad all the time. If I'd had a date with her to-night I'd have kept it and not been the fool I was to row a mile inshore to save walking. You have another guess coming, Frank. Next time also you spring an absolute lie on anybody try a plausible one. I'll bet you ten dollars you've never set eyes on this girl," and then to save discussion he stalked out of the cabin.

But the day of this denouément had been one long torture for Myrtle. For some unknown reason her grandfather had grown suspicious of her and had waited up and watched for her return the evening previous to greet her with sharp questions and, on her stubborn refusal to answer, with curses as hearty and deep as the sea whence they came. He had also given her a lot of needless work the next day with assurance that if he had further suspicions that she sneaked off to meet "one o' them popinjay yachters" he would flog her till the blood came. In spite of all that, she quit her work the moment he was well away on his afternoon fishing trip and ran to her playhouse. A long, weary, disconsolate wait here until she saw the yacht return was her reward, and then when eight o'clock came she dared the threatened whipping to steal away to the bridge.

And here, after another hour of lonely watching for Mark, who came not, and until she was ready to cry from the combined misery, a strange young man walked up on the bridge and accosted her.

"You are waiting for some one, my pretty maid, I guess," he said boldly, raising his cap, "and I know who 'tis. But he can't come and I'm here to take his place."

"You are!" she answered scared and off her guard; "who sent you and who are you?"

"Oh I'm from the yacht, too," he responded, stepping close to her beside the rail, "and Mark's friend, so its all right. He had to go to Sandy Bay.

"And so you are the charming fisher-maid Mark has been deserting us for the last few days," he added with characteristic effrontery and bold gaze; "well, I can't blame him. You are a bute."

It was an insolent speech, actually insulting and even this unsophisticated girl so construed it, and colored with shame. She recovered in a moment however, and met his stare with a defiant look. "I don't know who you are," she responded, taking a step backward, "and I don't believe he — I mean anyone sent you."

"Oh yes, he did," Frank laughed, "and I've heard all about you. My name's Goodnow, Frank Goodnow, and I own the yacht you've seen here. I got acquainted with your friend Miss Lee last eve at Sandy Bay and she told me all about you, so you see it's all right."

But this adroit mingling of truth and fiction failed quite to convince Myrtle. She was here to meet Mark. She knew he had gone to Sandy Bay, for she had seen him pull ashore and was certain he never would so betray her or send a substitute and so to end this interview she now turned abruptly away and walked to the end of the bridge and Frank followed.

"Wait a moment, Miss Myrtle Baldwin, don't be offish," he said coaxingly, "let's be sociable and get acquainted. I'm going to take your friend Cindy out for a sail to-morrow eve, and she wanted to have me invite you. You'll go, won't you?"

Visions of her grandfather's wrath and a black whip she had many times felt, flashed over her mind together with a sense of shame for her friend "Cindy." She knew what Cindy was. She knew that she bore a rather bad name in Sandy Bay, and was considered free and easy with men, and all this confused and mortified her. But her good sense kept her lips closed.

"You might as well be in the game," Frank continued, suavely, "and have some fun with us. Two of the boys play banjos and sing, I'll open wine, so come, say you will go," and now close beside her this puppy perked his face around to peer into hers.

And all the time she was growing more confused and scared. Also angry.

Mark was to meet her here this evening; he had promised. It was now half-past nine she guessed, it certainly seemed that she had been waiting two hours, there was trouble also brewing at home she knew full well, and to crown all her vexations here was this insolent young fellow in the way and insulting her!

"I don't want you to stay here and bother me," she exclaimed finally turning to him, her eyes blazing as her wrath rose. "And I won't go on your boat. I wish you'd go away and mind your own business."

Almost any fellow except a callous rake like this one would have done so; but Frank was not so to be shaken off.

"Come, come, my sweet little mermaid, don't let your angry passions rise," he said soothingly, "Mark won't show up, I'm dead sure. I'll bet he's making love to your friend Cindy now, so you and I might as well follow suit. Just for a starter now, come give me a kiss," and he followed the insult with an attempt to clasp her. It was the last straw — witnessed by Mark — and she turned on the instant and fled from the bridge.

And Frank Goodnow, smooth-tongued, nervy young Lothario that he was, and always keen enough to adapt his persuasions to the credulity of his victims, realized that he had failed in this case and returned to the yacht. But he resolved to try it once more.

When morning dawned again it brought a shift in wind and weather signs and Cap'n Sim made haste to get up steam and start for the safe anchorage of Sandy Bay. Mark was the only one of the party up and out when the yacht got under way and stood near the stern scanning Folly Island. It was early, too, a little after four, and he scarce hoped the girl he was fast falling in love with was yet awake. That she was and also watching was soon evinced by the flutter of a bit of white from an upper window of her home, which Mark returned with sudden eagerness.

And many times afterwards he recalled that mute good-bye, linking thought with thought, and always with a pang.

For over night, and after calm consideration for this girl and his own relation to her, he had decided not to try to see her here again, but quit the party at once and take upon himself the duty of finding her a home. He had thought his plans all out in the seclusion of his stateroom while the rest forgot him in gambling, also his excuse for leaving them so abruptly, to whom he would first go to, then next, where he would notify Myrtle to meet him, and all the method of this quite innocent elopement. Beyond that also had come the half-formed conclusion that the outcome of this would be — a marriage.

And why not? This girl was handsome enough to mean that in almost any young bachelor's eyes! She had a rugged honesty of purpose, and good horse sense which he knew would win in the long run. Her soul was attuned to the bold rocky cliffs of her island home and the grand old ocean voice. She had sentiment enough to love flowers, feed the sea gulls and build herself a romantic little castle to read and dream dreams in. She also was dauntless in her courage, ready to cut loose from all whom she knew and face the world alone.

Her sublime faith in him also touched his feelings; she was like a child believing in its father and ready to accept his direction in all things. All she needed was more education and the refinement which association with well-bred people would soon give and — suitable raiment. The question of her birth was one Mark never even thought of, or if at all, with satisfaction at its kinship with that of his own. All this had been meditated upon that night, and now again as the yacht made its detour around Folly Island and into Sandy Bay; and when the rest came on deck Mark was the same cool, collected, business-like fellow as usual, and also one who had apparently forgotten Folly Island.

"I shall be obliged to shake your pleasant company and the yacht to-day," he said to Frank in his off-hand, decisive manner. "I got some important mail last evening, some matters need my immediate attention and, much against my wishes, I shall have to leave you. Its a handy chance, too, for after breakfast one of the sailors can set me ashore and I can get carried to the railroad."

"I'm very sorry, old man," Frank responded in a tone that belied his words, and for selfish reasons, and then they went below for the morning meal. It was an almost silent and half surly one, for all except Mark had stuck to the card table until the wee small hours, a good deal of beer and whiskey had been consumed, and the gamblers all had headaches, and a "dark brown taste." They all shook hands with Mark at parting in the perfunctory way of those not kin to us, and he was honestly glad to go. He had joined them not because he liked such a roystering lot of "Injuns" but to enjoy an outing trip on the yacht. Frank — also conscious of this perhaps — added a thorn to the leave-taking with a "Ta-ta, old man, see you in the city and tell you how much fun we had with your pretty fisher maid. I shall see her to-night dead sure."

And Mark as he was rowed shoreward felt to murder this insulting fellow Frank, and almost swore he would never again speak to him.

CHAPTER IX

A CELTIC NEWS AGENT

"Be gorra I s'pose ye hate to be lavin' such a foine boat," quoth Barney McCann to Mark as the two started early that morning for the railroad station ten miles away, for this village stage driver — loquacious as a chattering ape he much resembled, inquisitive as a country town gossip-gatherer — knew all that was doing in Sandy Bay, and to pass the time also doled it out to all strangers who arrived or departed in his ancient carryall.

"An' ye must hev greeat fun," he added, "wid dhrinkin' an' singin' and playin' cards all the toime. An' by that same token I'd like to be ownin' sich a boat as ye come in meself, shure I wud."

"It's not mine," answered Mark bluntly, "I am merely a guest on board and had to return to the city."

"I made shure ye war the owner," Barney returned, squinting at Mark, "ye hov that manner wid ye. An' thar's a gal here she said she got to know the Cap'n an' he was a handsome young feller, she said."

"You've kissed the Blarney Stone, all right," laughed Mark.

"An' ye got credit fer kissin' the gal, so ye did," returned Barney also laughing, "an' she seemed proud o' that opporchunity. Did ye see much o' Cap'n Jud an' his gal while ye war lyin' down be Folly Cove," he added, returning to his mission of news gathering, "an' if ye did what do ye think o' her?"

"I saw Cap'n Jud twice and the girl once at her work," Mark responded stiffly, not at all desirous of being thus quizzed. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, bekase he's sich a brute an' the gal, shure she has a hard life wid him, an' I thought ye'd be tellin' yer own opinions."

"I haven't any," answered Mark in still chilly tone and determined to keep this girl out of the discussion. "I saw Cap'n Jud once close to and several times at a distance, and bought some lobsters of him. Does he make a good living there?"

"Dom poor," returned Barney bluntly, "an' nobody's sorry — on that score. Only for the wimmen, they do be stharved, they do, an' the gal, she has no clothes fit to be seen an' goes barefoot till snow comes."

But Mark made no response. He wouldn't discuss this unfortunate girl whose situation was now well known to him, certainly not with this loquacious Irishman bent on quizzing him, and so he lapsed into silence. It made no difference to Barney, however. He had a hearer to talk to and this was to him as the breath of life and so he rattled on for that entire ten miles without one moment's cessation until Mark felt he would like to strangle him and then throw him into some deep, deep hole.

And in that two hours every detail of this girl's life was gone over and doled out. Her first arrival and the mystery of it, her coming to school in calico pinafore and barefoot, her growing up and becoming bosom friends with this Lucinda Lee and how it was looked upon by Sandy Bay people, what a "bastely infiddle" her grandfather was, his abuse of her in countless ways, how her Aunt Perth was an old fool for not fighting for her, and with side lights on the girl's hard life and her mother's history also. It was a mélange both poignant and distressing to Mark. Towards its close and as they neared the flag-station depot, Barney let slip one pertinent remark that seemed prophetic.

"Some day that gal will run away, so she will, an' go to the bad as her mother did," he said, "an' be the Powers thar'll be none to blame her."

And at this verdict and more than ever before Mark now felt that his life's duty lay plain before him. But he was glad to escape Barney.

It was a day's journey to Good Will Farm, toward which he now started and glad was he to reach that haven,— his own home as it were — and the cordial hand clasp of Mr. Hinckley and his most excellent wife. It had been eighteen months and over since they had met, for Mark had been South the previous fall and winter on business, and now there was much to exchange of mutual interest. The school or home, its need of more cottages and funds to build them, the new library just erected, how the crops were promising and many other minor matters were all inquired into and discussed; Mark was shown that library, and two new cottages built since his last visit, and then came supper, and a tête-á-tête chat between the two men on the cooling piazza.

"Well, my dear boy, what's on your mind?" queried Mr. Hinckley directly, as was his way, when a pause came in the conversation, "I know something is by your manner and this unusual yet welcome visit."

"Why yes there is," laughed Mark, "a good deal. The fact is I am in a scrape, and beyond my wish for a visit home came for advice." Then without any hesitation and omitting nothing he told of his visit to Folly Island, his meeting with this girl, the impression she had made on him, her situation, education, condition, and what he had promised to do for her. It was quite a long recital. The Rev. Mr. Hinckley listened to it attentively, as he ever did to all human troubles, and at its close smiled a genial, sunny smile, and turned to Mark.

"Well, my dear fellow," he said, "you are in just the scrape I have been hoping you'd get into for some years, and my advice to you is, go back to the island as fast as you can, tell this old brutal sea-dog you want his granddaughter for a wife, and bring her here. Mrs. Hinckley will dress her suitably, I'll marry you, and then you can begin her education in the way it should be; the way God meant it should be also; as an honored wife and maybe mother."

"But I'm not sure, not *quite* sure yet that I want to marry her," returned Mark slowly, yet grateful for the advice so near his own conclusion. "I'll admit I mean to say 'will you?' to her some day, I guess she won't say no, but meantime she needs more than the bare ability to read and I presume write which constitutes her present education. Also a little more polish and contact with refined people."

"And where, how, and in what manner can she obtain this?" interrupted Mr. Hinckley. "From your description she can't be sent to any boarding school?"

"No, that is out of the question. The fact is all this has come upon me with a rush. My first thought was to help her out of what seemed a most pitiful condition, to put her in a way to earn a decent livelihood honestly, and into some sunshine for I saw her life was one of abject drudgery, and hatred besides, from this brute grandfather. It wasn't until last night that it dawned on me — that is, until I felt I might want her for my wife."

"And now you do," again interrupted Mr. Hinckley, "well, there you are back to what I advised. And now to follow out your first idea, where and how would you place her to earn a living? And what would be her status, a handsome young lady ostensibly under your protection, in any respectable family?"

"True enough," Mark answered promptly, "and that is out of the question. My next plan was to bring her here, let her study and be Christianized, if you please, by you, and then —"

"And then?"

"And then if she is willing there shall be a wedding here and you shall tie the knot.

"I've ample means," Mark continued, proudly, "she need never know but that she was earning her own way here for I doubt she'd be happy otherwise, and I could pay court to her here without scandal."

"All very nice, sensible, and philanthropic of you to an extent," responded Mr. Hinckley, after a long pause while he gave it thought, "but the only way I should feel it wise to accept the responsibility is for you to first go and propose marriage to her, have no concealments but bring her here as your intended wife and we will do the rest.

"My idea from the way you talk and act," he added laughing, "is that you will be back here in a month and want her to get ready for the ceremony as soon as possible. I see you are in love with her already."

"But what if this grandfather says 'no' to my bringing her here, and I'll bet he would, what then?"

"Is she of marriageable age, over eighteen I mean, and legally allowed to marry without her guardian's consent?"

"That I can't say, and I doubt if she knows her own age. She was left there as I told you a foundling, and has been hated ever since. No record of that date has been kept, I presume, and from my estimation of this grandfather he'd lock her up and stand guard with a cat-o'-nine tails before he'd let her come away with me."

"Well, its a curious and complex situation," responded Mr. Hinckley after giving it further thought, "and maybe you'd best let her run away and meet you as you planned and then bring her here. But it will make a big scandal in Sandy Bay and for the time all will believe she has gone the way her mother did — poor woman! It is to avoid this and save the girl's name that I proposed you go there and act above board. I still think it the best way. You might, if you feel sure this grandfather wouldn't consent, go to Sandy Bay, obtain a license, send a message to her, have the parson ready and marry her there and then. Mrs. H. and myself will go along gladly to see it done, then there can't be any scandal and you will feel better for it. Also have a wife for keeps which is what I honestly believe you need. This philanthropic plan of yours is creditable to your heart but not your head, for its a risky scheme at best and one you may regret. We will, of course, do all we can for her if you bring her here. But my advice is to go at once to her natural protector, brute though he may be, and make known your intentions."

Later Mrs. Hinckley joined them on the piazza and, as all wise women would after hearing the romantic story, agreed that her husband's advice was best to follow. And that night in his room Mark looked out upon the undulating hillside of half-mile-square expanse comprising Good Will Farm, with its dozen modern cottages, its Gothic church and granite library scattered amid green meadows, fields of grain and growing crops, all bathed in moonlight and marveled at the picture. Also that among the world of selfish men there was one with the brains, the nobility, and the push, to bring all this about and furnish such a home to maintain and educate homeless waifs and orphans. To Mark, once such a one, and who had found home, kindly care, education, and wise counsel here; the Rev. George W. Hinckley now seemed almost deified, or at least a wondrous man among men. Then, too, his advice in this unique romance also seemed beyond question the best to follow.

But after Mark had bade this almost parent good-bye, the next morning, fully intending to return to Folly Island the next day, several minor obstacles arose in his mind to checkmate that move. First, he knew Frank and his band of poker-playing "Injuns" were there and might remain a few days longer. To go a-wooing and meet them so soon after he had asserted that he was going to the city on important business was to say the least, humiliating. Then the almost certainty that Cap'n Jud would receive his proposal with scorn and curses also arose. His idea of that brute's nature was that he would keep this girl a practical slave rather than let her accept his offer of marriage and lose her services. And beneath these surface obstacles lay the consciousness that in spite of his genuine ardor such a step was to say the least — hasty. He was in love most certainly, but not sufficiently so to rush headlong and do foolish things. In the end, sober second thought won over Cupid and he kept on to the city and that night wrote the girl her first love letter. And such a mixture of caution, business sense, and tender sentiment was it it shall be quoted in full:

"My Dear Myrtle: —" he wrote: —

"I have become so impressed with your many charms of person, your heroic nature and winsome ways, as well as your unfortunate lot in life that I now wish you for my wife eventually, and to take charge of you as soon as you can get safely away from Folly Island. I have decided upon and made arrangements for you to go to Good Will Farm where you will be cared for by most excellent and worthy friends of mine, Mr. and Mrs. Hinckley. Here you will be treated as their own daughter would be, or a companion and not a menial. You can study some, have access to an excellent library, and attend church. You will be provided with suitable clothing and as my affianced wife, will receive all due respect. I hope, my dear girl, you will accept my proposal; we will be married any time within a year that suits your wishes, and while this may seem business-like, I feel and believe we start with love enough to go hand in hand through life together, and be happy. I shall try my best to make you so, anyway.

"Now I want you to make your plans to meet me one week from to-day at B——. There are but two trains a day you can come on, one leaving your Sandy Bay station about ten a. m., the other at four. Come on the morning one if possible as that will give us time to reach your destination the same day. I shall, however, be on the watch for you at both trains. I also advise you get away from Folly Island without having anyone find out which way you go. It's a long walk but by starting before midnight you can easily do it and avoid the road as much as possible. Another thing, don't lose your money for that is your sole means of escape.

"And now, my dear Myrtle, believe me

"Your loving friend,

"MARK MASON."

But the one weak link in this foolish plan failed when the test came. Cap'n Jud was handed the letter; true to his nature he opened and read it; cursed Mark for his interference and Myrtle for her deception, tore the letter in shreds, and started for Folly Island, fully intending to flog this hated waif until the blood ran.

CHAPTER X

DESOLATION AND DESPERATION

When Mark sailed out of Folly Cove that grey, overcast morning, it seemed to the watching girl as if her only friend was deserting her. The previous evening's failure to meet him, the insulting attempt of this fellow, Goodnow, to supplant the one she so much wanted to meet had cost her most of the night's sleep and now at early dawn to see this yacht sail away 'was like the pronouncement of doom. All her hopes now hinged on the promised letter; if that failed to come all that was left was to go away and face the world and her fight for a livelihood there, alone. All the consolation and assurance left her to recall was the one flutter of a handkerchief seen through tears on the yacht's deck and the faith that Mark would keep his promise and send for her. And on that missive now it seemed that her very life depended!

Her morning duties came along as usual with never a smile from withered, hopeless, Aunt Perth or word from her always sullen grandfather. Then to the wharf once more with its vile odors and filthy work.

And now her labor was more monotonous and disgusting than before. Her dress soon became brine-soaked, her back and arms began to ache, and worse than all these troubles, her heart was heavy as well.

The last evening's failure to meet Mark also added pain. She couldn't understand why it was or how it happened. She had seen him leave the yacht, land across the cove and start for Sandy Bay, then as soon as possible she had gone to the bridge to await him as agreed. Two hours of this only resulted in disappointment and to finally be accosted and insulted by this fellow, Goodnow. Worse than that, also his innuendoes regarding Mark and how he was probably amusing himself with Cindy rankled in her mind. She had never known jealousy before; now that green monster tortured her more than all else besides.

And to crown all Mark had said he should leave that day!

And then after three hours of this incessant toil and misery of mind combined, she looked up from her work and saw Goodnow approaching. It mattered not to her however. She was so utterly miserable that to be seen in her filthy garb by this white-duck-clad city yachtsman, was of no account except to add anger.

"Good morning, Miss Saucy fisher-maid," he accosted her, and raising his cap as he drew near. "How are you this morning? You see a bad penny always returns and I walked clear over from Sandy Bay to call on you."

But no answer came from Myrtle, who merely flashed one swift disdainful glance at him and kept on spreading fish, while ten rods away and unnoticed by him sat Cap'n Jud mending a net.

"Ain't you going to say good morning, or how-do to me," Frank continued stepping closer, "you might as well be sociable. I won't bite you."

But the girl answered not except by a flush of anger that flamed in her face.

For one moment this fellow whom nothing could affront stared at Myrtle with cool audacity. He noticed and noted also her brine-soaked dress so clinging that it disclosed every outline of her perfect form, her glossy coils of hair beneath the soft felt hat and her bare feet and ankles. The night before on the moonlit bridge he had thought her handsome; now to his lustful eyes she was alluring.

"I invited you, my pretty maid, to go on a trip with us last eve," he added suavely, after the scrutiny, "and please will you join us, Miss Iceberg? You see I want you so much I am willing to coax you?"

Then Myrtle rose in her wrath and faced him.

"I told you I didn't want to speak to you," she answered with a snap, "and I wouldn't go with you to save my life. I hate you!"

It was plain talk and anyone but a Frank Goodnow would have accepted his discomfiture. But he didn't.

"There, there, hold your horses," he returned sweetly, "and don't take my head off. Your friend Cindy and two other girls are going, so you best go and have the time of your life. Come, say yes, and I'll give you two dollars for every kiss I get."

For answer Myrtle picked up her empty crate and started for the fish house again and Frank followed.

And then Cap'n Jud looked up!

"Who be ye an' what ye want here?" he bellowed.

"I — I'm the owner of the yacht that was here," Frank stammered, "and come to invite your daughter, I suppose, to go on a sail. I met her last night you see and some of the Sandy Bay girls are going."

"Ye did, did ye, ye damned popinjay!" shouted Cap'n Jud now rising. "An' so you're the whelp she's out nights after, be ye? Wal, she won't go with ye, so git off my island or I'll kick ye off," and he started towards Frank.

But that young fellow, ready enough to insult a helpless girl, now waited for no further hint but turned and fled.

Then Cap'n Jud wheeled and faced Myrtle just emerging from the fish house.

"So that's what you're doin' nights is it!" he thundered, his face purple with rage. "Out meetin' that young squirt, be ye? I'll teach ye decency, I will," and grasping her arm he cuffed her once, twice, thrice with ringing blows. Then he shook her fiercely, cuffed her once more for good measure and resumed his net-mending again.

For one moment the girl was too much dazed by the sudden blows even to think, then she caught her breath and looked at him moving away, her eyes blazing with fury. Only an instant until the degradation and injustice of it all crushed her, then she sank to the ground sobbing.

Not once for the next two hours of her toil did she look at him or speak. Neither would or did she go to the house for dinner but kept on until her work was finished, and then she sat and watched the wide ocean and booming billows until her tyrant taskmaster came and pushed his dory off and rowed away. And now she hurried to her only spot for consolation, her stone hut, with the almost hopeless hope that Mark might come here to find her.

Her life had been desolate enough before; now it seemed ten times more so and unless he sent for her all that was left was to go away alone, or throw herself into the merciless, moaning ocean.

Two hours of this waiting, watching, hopeless mood, with now and then tears, and again moments of useless anger, and then Mark's promises began to leaven her spirits. That he was to find her a place to go to, to write to her, to save her from this wretched and degrading life, she still believed and trusted. Then the means he had given her for escape occurred to her! She hastened to the niche where it was hid, took the roll of money out once more and counted it, kissed the bills one by one — his money loaned her for protection, for a new life in another world!

When sunset came she started for the house — home it would never seem again — and buoyed by this new hope, she no longer feared this brutal grandfather. He might curse her, revile her, beat her, it mattered not. Only for a few days longer was this to last, then a message of salvation or to go anyway. And now plans of how she was to find excuses to go to Sandy Bay and ask for letters began to form in her mind? Only afternoons while he was away trawl-setting or net-hauling was this possible, but go then she must and would.

The next day brought another hour of gloom for, busy at her work in sullen silence she saw the yacht sail out past the island and on its canopied after deck three girls in white attire. She knew who they were, one was her friend Cindy, the others, girls who worked with her in the canning shop in Sandy Bay and rated as kin to her in name and fame. And now they were being admired and flattered while she was alone and hated. She could hear voices also and laughter from the yacht, then singing and sounds of banjo-playing. Presently that all faded away and the yacht grew smaller and finally a mere white speck far out on the wide ocean. She saw it return at twilight then the next day sail away to be seen no more.

On the third afternoon — for not sooner could she hope to receive a letter — she stole away to Sandy Bay and timidly asked for one.

"Nothin' for ye," answered Amos Orton, eyeing her keenly, "who be ye s'pectin' one from, one o' them yachtin' fellers?"

"No-o," answered Myrtle, blushing rose red, "I — I don't know them."

It was the first step into her new life and need of evasion and it scared her.

Another shock, this time a shameful one, came a few moments later for leaving the village she met Cindy.

"Oh, Mert," she exclaimed, "where have you been for so long and why haven't you been over to see me? Tell me, too, why you was so mean to Frank and wouldn't go with us on the yacht? I sent him over after you, you wouldn't speak to him hardly he said, and he got insulted, too, by that brute grandad of yours; what does it all mean?"

"You knew well enough I couldn't go on the yacht for I hain't got clothes fit and Grandfather wouldn't let me anyway," Myrtle answered, "and I didn't like this Frank, either, he's too — too cheeky."

"Oh, you silly chump," laughed Cindy, "what's that to do with it, and he's handsome enough to catch any girl and rich too? You missed a good time besides, for we had great fun — singing, dancing, nice things to eat and wine, champagne, think of it, and that costs three or four dollars a bottle!"

"I don't care," returned Myrtle slowly," "I'd been ashamed of my clothes and I don't like such a fellow as this Frank either. I s'pose he kissed you," she added, eyeing Cindy, "and all the other fellows too, didn't they?"

"Of course," responded Cindy, without a shade of humiliation, "they was doing that every five minutes and it was great larks. We each of us got five dollars, too, one from each of the boys before we came ashore to make up for our day's wages they said."

"I don't want money earned that way," replied Myrtle scornfully, "I wouldn't let a lot of fellows kiss me in public if I starved."

"No, I s'pose not, and the more fool you," asserted the shameless Cindy, "you'd stay on Folly Island, go barefoot and be a slave before you'd pick up a dollar that way, but I wouldn't. What thanks do you get for being good in this world, I'd like to know," she continued warmly, "or who will buy you new shoes or a jacket when winter comes? No one, and you know it. Here I am and sister Molly working in the can shop all the time and dad drinkin' up every dollar he earns and we keepin' house for him. Who cares for us or whether we are good or not? I'm sick of it all," she added more vehemently, "and the can shop too, and smell of fish oil, phew! And I'm going away too!"

"You are!" returned Myrtle in surprise. "When and where are you going?"

"Oh, that's a secret I didn't mean to let out, and you mustn't tell. I'll tell you, Mert," she added after waiting a moment to be urged, "if you will promise, hope to die you won't tell? Will you?"

"Why, yes," answered Myrtle in more surprise. "I've no reason to give your secrets away, Cindy."

"Well, then," continued Cindy in a lower tone, "I'm going to the city and Frank is going to find a nice place for me, model in a cloak store, he said, or something of that sort, and a three-room flat to live in. We talked it all over that day on the yacht and he gave me money to go with."

"And you are really going?" queried Myrtle, recalling her friend Mark, the money hid on Folly Island, and feeling herself blush. "I shall be so sorry for I shall miss you."

"Oh you needn't be sorry," answered Cindy gayly, "for I'll be better off."

"But what about your sister Molly? Have you told her?"

"Not I, and I don't mean to," she replied heartlessly. "I'm just going and say nothing to nobody. I only let on to you before I thought. Say," she added again lowering her voice, "I'm going to tell you something else I've guessed, or Frank has. He says you've been meeting a friend of his, the one who went away, have you?"

Myrtle had not been much surprised at her schoolmate's disclosures. She knew what gossips had said of her and her own callous indifference to it. She also knew Cindy's ideas of men and their attentions. This new plan while a practical confession of the truth of all evil report was not surprising, either. But this query was, and she blushed crimson.

"Oh, I see it's true," laughed Cindy gleefully, "and I'm so glad. Now, Mert, you old splendid, we are both in luck and can go together just as well as not. You don't care a rap for your home. You are starved there and made a slave and Frank said he could fix matters for you, too, and we can room together and be company. In fact, he made me promise to go and coax you to come also. Of course your friend will be notified and won't he be surprised? It's just elegant!" And Cindy's eyes sparkled for she really cared a good deal for this schoolmate friend and waif.

As for Myrtle, guilty in a way, yet innocent of any guile, she felt hot and cold by turns, then as if all the world knew her secret. And that it was a shameful one as well. For one moment she gasped for breath, then recovered.

"Your friend Frank has been lying to you," she answered with forced calmness, "and don't know anything about me. I went out for a walk the other night, he met me on the bridge, tried to make free with me, and then I ran away. Everything else he says is a lie."

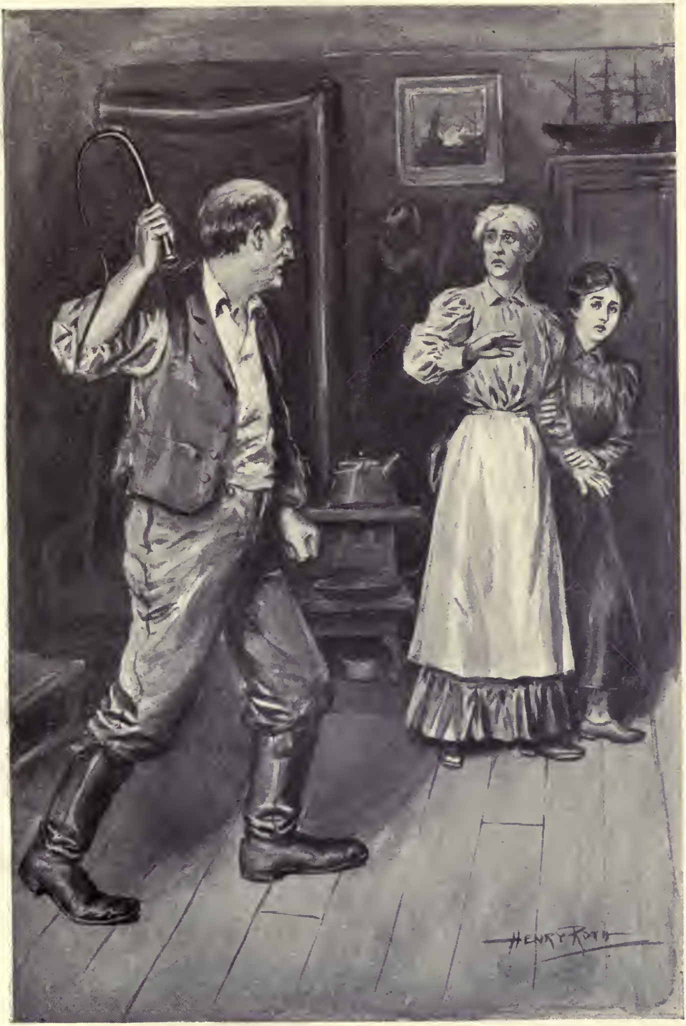
"But wasn't you there to meet this Mr. Mason," persisted Cindy, "Frank said you was and he knew it he said."

To evade was hard for Myrtle, to lie directly even more so, but now she was cornered.

"No," she answered firmly, "I wasn't there to meet anybody and your friend is a liar."

"Well, don't get mad about it," pleaded Cindy, "and don't tell nobody about my plan. I'm sorry you won't go too," she added tenderly, "we have been friends so long, there is no one in the world I love half so well as you and say, dear, let us stick together now! You know what folks think of — of you here and always will? I've stood up for you ever since you was a kid and your folks only hate you and will be glad if you go. Come now, say you will, quit your slave life and be somebody instead of a dirty drudge for that hog Cap'n Jud!"

It was a sore temptation, and few girls so hopeless, so hated and with the shameful ban of birth over them would have resisted. But Myrtle did. Yet all that saved her from thus wrecking herself



" Let that girl alone, Judson Baldwin!"—*Page 126.*

was Mark's promise to aid her and the faith that he would!

"No, no, Cindy," she said firmly, "I can't go with you and become — do what I know you will. I shall miss you so much, I've nobody to care for me now, but — I can't do it. I'd rather die first."

"Well, then, its good-bye for good I s'pose," Cindy asserted biting her lips, "for I've promised and I am going to-morrow."

Then the eyes of the two — friends still in spite of all — met for one last long, appealing look. Only for an instant, then a rush of clasping arms, lips meeting once, twice, thrice, and thus they parted.

And Myrtle slowly returning to Folly Island knew that her future held but one hope and one friend now, and reaching the bridge — a spot hallowed beyond all others — she sank down upon it and sobbed in abject misery.

CHAPTER XI

FINAL DESPERATION

Only once more did Myrtle dare go to Sandy Bay and ask for a letter and then failing to receive it she began to lose hope. One was there awaiting her, however, but owing to dim light and failing eyes Postmaster Orton had put it in the "O" instead of "B" box and the second weak link in Mark's chain failed to hold.

"Thar's suthin' curis goin' on," he muttered to himself after Myrtle left the store and hurried back to Folly Island. "Fust that gal o' Cap'n Jud's comes askin' fer a letter three times goin'— never had one in her life afore ez I've noticed —'n' yesterday Cindy Lee lit out tellin' Barney she was goin' to Kingdom Come which was ez much ez sayin' none o' your business. 'N' she flashed a roll o' money too, Barney said, in payin' him. My 'pinion is them yachtin' fellers takin' the gals out sailin' has raised the devil all round."

Later developments were more convincing.

Myrtle, however, was unconscious of all this surmise; she had not even stopped to ask for Cindy, and once back at the island went about work more hopeless and sullen than ever. She had now waited five days, two more passed in the same monotonous manner with only brief intervals when she visited her playhouse to shed tears and watch the solemn ocean, and then the climax came, for that day Cap'n Jud had visited Sandy Bay late in the afternoon, was given the letter addressed to Myrtle, and with his domineering arrogance and total disregard of her right had opened and read it. To add to its sinister effect on his temper he had also been told of Cindy's departure and whom she probably went to meet. It is needless to say that when he once more reached his home he was almost in a mood for murder.

Supper was ready and Aunt Perth and Myrtle both awaiting him when he came in. He neither looked at or spoke to them, but strode through the sitting room as if crossing his own ship's quarter deck, entered his room opening from the sitting (and living) room, and came back the next moment with a heavy black-snake whip in his hand.

"Come, strip ye young Jezebel, ye shameless hussy!" he bellowed, glaring at poor Myrtle while his face grew purple with rage and like a demon's.

"Come, off with yer clothes," he shouted again, striding toward her, "I'll teach ye to plan a runaway 'n' go to hell after yer mother! Come, peel now!" And he grabbed her by the arm and shook her.

And then for the first time in her life his sister dared to assert her womanhood and grasped his arm.

"Let that girl alone, Judson Baldwin!" she too almost shouted pushing him back. "She shan't strip and you shan't whip her so or I'll leave this house to-night and she, too, 'n' never set foot in it again! Ain't you ashamed, you brute," she added in tone like a funeral knell, "and she a grown-up girl! Shame on you, Judson, shame on you, I say, and let her be or you'll live and die here alone!"

And for once in all his selfish, domineering life, that surly demon misnamed man — whose wife had died from harsh treatment and neglect, whose daughter had been driven from home by it,— was cowed by the blazing wrath of his aged sister and stepped back.

"She meant to run away like her mother and for the same end she did. And ye was given money for it too, I s'pose," he growled, again glaring at the girl. "Where is it, I want to know? It's some'ers I reckon, but you'll fetch it to me to-morrer 'fore ye git a morsel to eat or I'll larrup ye. Now go to bed 'n' stay hungry till ye fetch me that money." And glad so to escape him the girl slunk away to her room.

And here, looking out upon the starlit sky and dark hopeless ocean, she knew that the end had come, that she had been sent for but would never read the message and that come weal or woe she must leave the island that night! One hour, two hours, she sat waiting, listening, almost despairing, until all sounds had ceased below and then she prepared for flight. Carefully removing her old soiled work dress she drew on her only best one, a blue flannel, her one good pair of stockings and with shoes in hand and man's hat on — her sole head covering — and taking her old dress for a purpose she crept softly down the stairs. Once out in the free air she ran down the winding, scarce visible path to the point. Half-way there she halted, drew on her shoes and kept on to her stone hut. The precious money was next secured and thrust in her bosom, then to her garden to bid that one little spot of happy diversion good-bye, and then back to her hut she ran.

That was the hardest to part from of any on the island. It had cost her hundreds of hours of toil and heavy lifting, each and every one of its stones had been hunted for on the beach and carried thither to use, and in a way this playhouse had become and was her own little home. It had seemed to cheer her in lonely hours and its always open door to bid her welcome. Here she had dreamed dreams. Here she had fancied she was someone else, and not a motherless waif denied and despised. Here she had read her books and here lived over the joys and sorrows of the wonderful people in them, wept for Uncle Tom and Little Eva, clenched her fist and hoped Legree would be killed, pitied Robinson Crusoe, and almost gasped for breath while she followed Gilliat in his famous fight with the devil-fish. Here she had shed bitter tears for Bébée and Folly Farine of Ouida's conception, felt Tricotrin and Strathmore were the noblest men created, and Lady Vavasour the vilest woman. And worse for her in one way; here she had first learned how despised a child born out of wedlock was, and why she was so hated by her grandfather. But go and leave this dearly loved spot of many memories she must and now; looking at it with moist eyes and then up at the vast starlit sky and out over the darkened ocean; somehow at this moment, she began to wonder who God was and if He was watching her! She had been told there was such a Being in the books she enjoyed reading best, in the dull ones His existence was denied, which seemed proof of their falsity. This diversity of belief had also been duly considered by her, her better sense always saying that there must have been some Power who created all things, and now in this moment of desperation He might help her. One moment only she wavered, the next she was on her knees beside the hut with her face against its cold and unresponsive stones.

" O God," she said, " if there is a God and you can help me, please I beg of you do it now! I am alone and afraid. I have no one to help me and may be you can. Tell me first if I can find the man who promised to help me and where. Tell me if I shall find some home where I can work and earn my keep, and I will. Keep all bad men away from me and not let me be robbed. Please God help me to-night and give me courage to go on. Please help me, dear God, somehow just a little."

Then she stood up and looked around.

Only the bare rocks faced her on one side, the moaning ocean on the other, the sky above, beside her the hut. But somehow she felt stronger. One more long lingering look at that crude structure, then she knelt again, kissed one stone then another and yet another.

" Good-bye, little house, good-bye," she whispered, " and maybe he may come here sometime to find me." Then she rose to her feet, turned and fled up the island. Near her home she left the path, made a detour back of it, and ran to the bridge. Here again and out of breath she paused to lean her face against the rail where Mark had stood, dropped her old dress and then on again. When Sandy Bay and its spectral houses came in sight she halted once more, for now possible discovery faced her. That must never be, and now she turned from the road and skulking along beside fences, stooping as she crossed open fields, she finally made this wide detour, regained the road beyond the village, and then ran until so breathless that she had to sit down. And now for the first time a strange faintness came over her and little rills of perspiration were traversing her face. What time it was she knew not, or how far she had come. Ten miles she had been told separated Sandy Bay from the railroad and trains, but all she knew of what a railroad was had been obtained from pictures and description, she had never seen one. Five, ten minutes, she panted until breath came better, then suddenly thought of her money with a start, felt in her bosom for the roll, found it there all safe, with a great throb of her heart as she did so, and tucked it further in and started on. One house came in sight bringing a sense of fear, was passed safely, then another also dreaded until well to the rear, and then a long hill. Up this she toiled to find her legs trembling at its top and she faint and dizzy for not a morsel of food had passed her lips since morn the day before. She went slower now as perforce she had to; barely crawling up the hills then running down the declines and so on and on, until she tottered.

And then suddenly she came to two narrow iron rails and beside them and near the road an open shed. Looking around and back of her she saw the first faint signs of dawn. With that also came her fears once more. Some one from Sandy Bay might come here and know her and that would never do. Barney she knew would not come until afternoon but others might. Then Mark's orders to follow the track until some other station was reached and wait there now recurred to her and she started westward toward it.

The morning light also increased, the birds began to sing, the sun arose, yet all this marvel of a new-born day was unseen by her. She saw only the two glistening rails she followed and ties over which she stumbled. There was mile after mile of this wearisome flight while dust coated her dress and face, adown which the sweat trickled. Her feet began to blister, her head to swim, and the track to wave up and down and to right and left ahead of her. Once, twice, thrice she fell headlong from faintness and utter exhaustion, each time to rise and plod on. But the end of her young vigor was nearing; stop she must or drop dead, and coming to a fringe of low scrub spruce beside the track she dove into their cool shelter and sank to earth unconscious.

How long this lasted she never knew, only sometime that hot sultry July morn an oncoming roar, a quiver of earth beneath her, and the deafening din of a passing train brought consciousness, she sat up, and just at that moment a dog bounded up to her, began barking and as she arose a man with a grey chin-whisker and garbed in long brown overalls, shirt, and broad straw hat, peeped into the thicket at her.

"Here, Peter, come back!" he shouted to the dog. "Don't be skeerin' the gal. Hullo, Miss," he added in surprised tone, "who might you be, and was ye takin' a nap?"

"I guess so, sir," Myrtle answered quick to see he had a kindly face and grateful for it. "I — I've come a long way and was awful tired."

"Wal, ye look it," he responded smiling, "'n' purty dirty too."

And that blunt honest speech won the poor scared girl's confidence in an instant.

"But how came ye here," he continued, "was ye follerin' the ties? 'Scuse me miss for askin' 'tain't none o' my business but a young gal like you nappin' in the bushes kinder took me onawares."

Then the two looked at one another while the dog drew near, sniffed at the girl's dress and satisfied that she was no enemy sat down on his haunches and also watched her.

"I guess I can trust you, sir," Myrtle now asserted with one of her appealing glances and a smile that also won this farmer's heart. "I've run away from someone who hated me, I was going to the next station to take a train and go ever so far away and please promise me you won't tell nobody you saw me."

"Why, sartin, sartin, 'tain't my business," the man ejaculated, "an' I'm sorry fer ye. How far hev ye come? Beg pardon agin, ye needn't answer, hev ye had anything to eat to-day?"

And for those kindly words, the first she had heard since Mark left her, that girl's heart gave a throb of gratitude.

"I am 'most starved," she explained, "I hain't had a morsel since yesterday morning, and please, sir, if you'll give me something to eat I can pay for it."

"Wal, you jist come with me right quick, an' thar won't be no payin' either. I'll find ye some vittles at the house," and taking her arm gently he led her out of the thicket to a path.

And so grateful was the poor runaway girl for this unexpected aid she could have kissed the hand that clasped her arm. And also, be it said, she never afterwards met a man with chin-whiskers without instinctively feeling she could trust him.

To a secluded farm-house with capacious barns beside a seldom traveled road she was now escorted, a motherly old lady resembling a belted meal sack met them with open-eyed astonishment, who addressed the farmer as "Father" and received his story of how he found the girl with "Mercy me," "Land sakes," and "You poor critter," all of which sounded sweet to the hungry and very weary girl. An invitation to wash at the kitchen sink came next, cold meat, bread and butter, milk and pie, were brought forth in ample supply, and poor Myrtle was made to feel that the world she feared held at least two people with kindly hearts. Something of her story was also now related by her. How she had been brought up by a grandfather who hated and abused her as well, her many privations, the hard and filthy work allotted her, the many blows and frequent curses added to that, and how her sole enjoyment for years had been found in stolen hours, the building of a playhouse, a tiny flower garden, and a few books. Not a word about Mark or his promises, where she came from, the names of any one or her right name. And to the credit of this old farmer, Anson Cony, and his rotund wife, neither questioned her regarding these details. Like Good Samaritans they merely took her in, fed, cared for and petted her without exacting more than she cared to tell.

"Ye need sleep now, poor gal, most o' anything," the farmer said after Myrtle had told so much of her story, "'n' mother'll fix ye up now on the settle for a good nap. Bimeby I'll hitch up 'n' take ye to the train. If 'tain't axin more'n ye want to tell, whar was ye figgerin' on goin'?"

"I — I don't know," she returned hesitating, "only I want to go a long way off and find work."

"Wal, we'll talk o' that later," he answered soothingly, "now get some sleep."

And "fixed up" she soon was on the huge chintz covered settle with its soft pillows, and left to forget her sorrows and troubles, lulled to blessed slumber by the drowzy hum of bees, the cool breeze bringing the scent of new-mown hay into the open windows, and a soothing sense of security. So wearied was she also by that all-night tramp and tax on her nerves, she slept on and on until past train-time and almost sunset.

But Fate was conspiring against her even in this, for that very day was the one Mark had written her to meet him at B.—, he was there awaiting her anxiously and had she taken that afternoon train, there was a chance that the two might have met. But she came not and he began to surmise all sorts of mishaps and upsets to their plan of meeting; then to curse himself for not following Mr. Hinckley's advice at first, and after waiting another day, started for Folly Island.

But it was too late.

CHAPTER XII

INTO THE GREAT WORLD

When the runaway girl awoke after that long afternoon sleep the old farmer was just bringing in two brimming pails of milk and she, much refreshed, now glanced at the tall clock, hesitated a moment, scarce realizing where she was, then sprang up and entered the kitchen.

"Wal, girlie," he exclaimed cheerfully, "how be ye, 'n' did ye sleep good? I told mother not to wake ye fer thar's 'nother day comin'. Trains'll run jest the same, 'n' 'nother night here won't harm ye."

The fact was that this kindly farmer and his wife living alone here and discussing this girl and her story while she slept, had formulated the excellent plan of keeping her here for good will's sake and company, or until some safe and sane disposition of her future could be made. Her hard, work-all-day training, now also disclosed itself for almost the first thing she said after his greeting was "Can't I help you some, sir, or do something if I am to stay?"

"Wal, ye might," he answered pleased at this, "mother's in the garden pickin' currants, ye kin jine her if ye like," and Myrtle did. More than that she "took holt" as the farmers would say, at supper-getting, dish-washing and so forth, an action and intent alike pleasing to all. And that evening a consultation was held and proposal made the girl that came near keeping her there indefinitely.

"Ye say, Iva," the old farmer asserted now addressing her by the name she had given, "that ye hain't no fixed plan in yer mind or place sot on fer reachin'; only ye want work, which is to yer credit. Now this world is a purty wide range fer a young gal like you, 'n' thar's a good many wolves in sheep's clothin' in it. In the fust place 'n' 'thout meanin' to be pryin', hev ye got much money with ye?"

"I have some, sir," she answered nervously, "all I shall need to go anywhere, and more."

"Wal, so fur so good, but s'pose ye don't find work 'n' s'pose ye get robbed what then?

"Now," he continued, not waiting for an answer, "you'll 'scuse us, but we figger, mother 'n' I, that you've started on a Tom-fool errand, an' 'scuse me agin fer bein' blunt, ye ain't togged out jest right fer it. What ye run away fer ain't no concern o' ours, no doubt ye had to; but goin' on in the fix ye are, is. Now we kinder think ye best stay here a spell, help 'round the house, mother'll take ye over to the village 'n' get some new calico fer a dress o' two, some shoes 'n' a hat like wimmen wear, an' then if ye must go on, go rigged ez a gal orter be."

It was homely advice, wise advice, and Myrtle was keen enough to realize it. And now another fixed conclusion came to her. She had planned to meet Mark at his bidding; that had been sent her but she knew full well that she would never learn it or where to meet him. She had his card wrapped in the roll of money now in her bosom (she thought) but to go on to that city, dressed as she was, was out of the question.

"I'll stay here a few days if you will be so kind as to keep me," she responded after a pause. "I know I must get some new clothes and shoes."

"That's right, quite right," ejaculated the farmer, pleased that so much had been conceded, "an' when ye git fixed up 'n' find ye kin hitch hosses with us; mebbe ye'll conclude to stay for reasonable wages, say three dollars a week and keep?" More of this talk of ways and means followed, these two now believing the girl would conclude to remain with them, and finally her sense of secrecy or need of concealment wore away and after first exacting a promise of never to tell anyone, she made a clean breast of her past life and where she came from. Only one thing was retained, her meeting with Mark and his interest in her. That was a sacred secret she would not now or ever, disclose under torture. A surprise also came to her after this recital.

"I know Cap'n Jud, 'n' what sort o' man he is 'n' all about him," the farmer exclaimed after she had told so much. "'N' you, too," he added smiling. "Sandy Bay ain't more'n fifteen miles from here cross kentry 'n' I was thar 'bout two years ago. I don't blame ye fer runnin' away," he continued, sympathetically, "they told me that Cap'n Jud was a regular old skeezicks 'n' all-round cuss, 'n' how he licked ye, kept ye from goin' to meetin' 'n' 'thout decent clothes. Ye needn't worry 'bout us tellin' on ye; we're too sorry fer ye, Iva."

Another surprise, this time a painful one, came to the girl after the evening of pleasant exchange ended, for her first act after the seclusion of her room was reached was to take out the precious roll of money to look at Mark's card.

But that was missing!

How, and in what way she had lost it she could not guess, only it was gone and with it all hope of being enabled to reach him by letter or find him in the great city he came from.

And then this unsophisticated and timid girl sat down and cried.

She had dared a desperate flight by night, meant to take a train and go far away, then stop at some point and obtain simple but decent raiment, next look for and find work and when once so established, to write Mark, or if forced to, finally go to him. He was all her hope and mainstay. No thought of the impropriety of so going to him entered her innocent mind, for reared as she had been and untutored in the world's way, he seemed to her as the Savior would to a Christian believer.

But the money was safe, six ten and two twenty-dollar bills, and as she once had, so she now again kissed them. Not because they were so much money, but from the fact that they represented the means to go on, to escape the shame of her past life, and dress herself " fit to be seen."

With morning also came more courage and resignation to her fate. With it, as well, the need of caution and the thought that she better not be seen in this near-by village. That she now disclosed to these new friends with the outcome that they went shopping instead while she remained in seclusion here. A week of more peace and happiness than she had ever known in all her life before now ensued; the cutting, fitting, and making of a new dress by this embryo mother and daughter became a part of it; a young lady's summer hat, stockings, shoes, gloves, and parasol, were also obtained by an expenditure of thirty-four dollars, and then Miss Myrtle Baldwin, alias Iva Stone, surveyed herself in a mirror, felt herself Somebody and wished Mark could see her now! And with reason, for modest as her raiment was; a grey flannel outing costume, severely simple, a white collar and sailor tie of dark blue, shell combs to hold the thick coils of hair, with the rose-tinted cheeks, expressive eyes and well-rounded form, produced a picture all men would admire. With this also came a new courage and self-reliance. No longer was she the much-abused slave on Folly Island compelled to perform the filthiest work amid fish-house odors, but freed from that forever. Never again would she set foot on that barren island or be cursed and beaten! The world and a new life was before her and she ready to face it, garbed as a young lady should be, or at least decently. One pang only came as a reminder; her poor flowers must now wither and die, and her dearly loved playhouse remain unvisited.

And then she thought of Mark!

Ah me, in spite of this new life and hope, where was he and was she ever to meet him again?

Neither had she now a suspicion that during this week of seclusion and transformation, he; a much-worried and decidedly unhappy man, had four times sped by her hiding spot on a train, or had been within a quarter of a mile of her, that he had visited Folly Island to meet insult and defiance, had questioned every conductor on the line to learn if they had seen a girl like her, and was at this moment, many hundred miles away and sadly vexed by the problem of where to find her.

But the fear of her grandfather still remained. Scarce a moment of all this week of new life had been free from this insidious dread, she had seen him in her dreams with face fierce in anger and holding aloft that black-snake whip, had heard him shout "Come, strip, ye shameless hussy!" and then weakened, faint and trembling from this fear and humiliation. That he was likely to pursue her she felt sure; that he could and would drag her back to Folly Island if found, she also believed; and so her only safety lay in going on and absolutely hiding herself. But that week of her stay in the home of Anson Cony had wakened a unique interest in him. He had never been blessed with a daughter, his two sons had grown up, gone away, and had homes of their own, and now this unfortunate runaway girl, with all that made her interesting, had dropped into his daily life like a young angel. She had met him every morning with a dog-like look of gratitude, followed and watched him at the milking, pig-feeding and other chores, was anxious to help in any way possible, and thankful for the chance, and was as much so with "mother." Day by day she had grown into his feelings; like a flower opening to the sun, so had her face and self-helpful soul opened to him; and now he very much wanted her to stay. Then her plan of going to some far-away town to find work seemed all wrong. She could of course obtain employment and support herself but it was a cheerless outlook for a young girl and he too, though a farmer, knew full well how many pitfalls lay in her path.

"Ye'd best stay with us, Iva, 'n' run yer chances," he said the last evening of her stay. "Nobody round here knows who ye be 'n' whar ye cum from, an' we kin fix up some story 'bout you bein' an orphan my son Abner wanted a home for. Ye kin change yer name fer a spell, an' if wuss comes to wuss 'n' yer grandad shows up, ye kin swear ye are of age, 'n' I kin take the law fer defense. We hain't no darter o' our own. We've kinder took ye into our feelin's, 'n' ez ye kin help 'n' take wages for it, ye hain't no cause for feelin' obligated."

It was all a very nice plan and proposal; it almost brought tears to poor Myrtle's eyes, but the insensate dread of her ogre grandfather, the ever-present shame of her birth — the bar sinister — and an underlying will and wish to escape that last and worst humiliation decided her.

"I thank you ever so much," she said in response to all this, "but I'd best go on somewhere and find work where no one knows who I am or can find out. I can write to you," she added hopefully, "and some day maybe I can come back and visit you."

Poor girl, she little realized how Fate and the tides of life would sweep her onward and to forget this promise.

Another and quite unexpected factor in her life cropped out the next morning when "father" had hitched up his sedate nag, and was ready to convey her to the station.

"Here is a letter," she said shyly to the rotund Mrs. Cony. "It's for some one I know, a Mr. Mark Mason and he may come here looking for me. I promised to write him but I've lost his address."

No more, not a word of betrayal of him or his interest in her or how his advice or money was responsible for this escapade of hers. Just the forlorn hope thus admitted, that he might come here seeking her, and if so would receive her message.

"Ye hain't told me whar ye're headin' for," the old farmer said to her on the way to the station and bringing this matter up for the first time. "Ye'd orter, too," he added hesitating, "we sartinly want to know, fer ye might git into trouble."

"I don't know, myself," she answered in her utter ignorance of what travel meant, "I just thought I'd get onto the train, ride a long way off and then look for work. I shan't feel safe until I am so far from here no one can find me."

That this was a rather vague plan never occurred to her. It did later, however.

But parting from this old farmer — the first man who had ever acted like a father to her,— was not an easy matter. And even at the station, her courage came near failing and she felt like going back with him. The world she had been so eager to escape into seemed a more forbidding one now that she was actually about to take the plunge, and the question of where she was to stop a more pertinent one. The only faith that nerved her to it was, the belief she could easily find work anywhere and so earn food and shelter. Work had been her portion so far, she had been taught that that was all she was fit for, so now this education became her religion, as it were.

But when the train came roaring up to the station — the first one ever seen by her except at a distance during the past week — she began to tremble, and had farmer Cony been keener-eyed at this moment, he could have taken her by the arm and led her away without a word of resistance.

"Wal, good-bye, Girlie, 'n' God bless ye," he said instead. "Take good care o' yerself 'n' don't ferget to write us." Then with a sudden and quite unexpected heart-throb he bent and kissed her. As for poor Myrtle, the ignorant yet courageous waif of Folly Island, she could not speak. And when once in the car, and peeping out of the window for a parting look at the kindly old man, a mist of tears hid even the station.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GROWL OF A SEA-DOG

Love to a man is, after all said about it by poets and romancers, merely an episode of his existence. To some, it comes early in life and is therefore more painful, also bearing the earmarks of precosity. To others, it arrives later and then more apt to be tempered by selfish consideration. In Mark's case it began from a sense of pity for this unfortunate fisher-maid, and grew with his really generous intention to befriend her. In a way, or rather in a moment of romantic sympathy, he had assumed a sort of protectorship over her future and once accepted in that rôle the rest of the charming illusion followed.

He also, while awaiting her arrival on the date and at the place appointed formulated all his plans regarding her, how he wished her to go with him to this Good Will Farm as his fiancée and so remain a year to improve herself in study and social ways. That her coming in response to his letter was a virtual acceptance of his proposal he also considered, and the more he recalled her demeanor during their last meeting, how sure he was he could have gathered her in his arms at the moment of parting, and how sweet her face upraised in the moonlight was, the more anxious he became for her arrival. He had no need to woo her any more, she was coming now, as his to watch over, protect, and love without further question; and Mark an eager lover now, paced the platform, consulted his watch, and awaited the morning train. It was late this time, almost twenty minutes, each one counted by Mark, and when no rosy-cheeked fisher-maid alighted from it, he felt woefully disappointed. A six-hour wait until the afternoon one followed and when she failed to arrive on that he grew seriously worried. Some slip in the plan he was sure had occurred, and cogitating upon this; how seldom she could go to Sandy Bay or how Cap'n Jud might have intercepted the letter; Mark felt convinced he had and thus actually hit upon the real reason for her failure to come.

But wait another day he must to be safe; it would never do to have her come here and not meet him, and so he did, and a most miserable and long-drawn-out one it was, too!

Bright and early the next morning he took the first train for Sandy Bay.

Arriving at that, a flag-station on the line, Mark found himself the only alighting passenger with no person, stage, or stage driver in sight. Only the narrow, sandy road crossing the track here and pointing the way under a blazing July sun. Recalling his ride over its ten miles of ups and downs, a week or more previous with the voluble Barney, Mark felt that his slow horse and wornout carryall would be worth ten dollars an hour and cheap at that. But there was no help for it now. Walk he must or hunt for some farmer to carry him to Sandy Bay and there wasn't a house in sight. He could, of course, wait here six hours for Barney's arrival then, but just now Mark was in no mood for waiting. It was ten when he started for Sandy Bay looking fresh as a daisy with spotless linen, jaunty summer suit, straw hat and shiny tan shoes; it was two p. m. when he arrived there, his collar a limp rag, clothes brown with dust, face sunburned, blisters on each of his heels, and he, faint from hunger. A lunch of crackers and cheese washed down by lukewarm soda water revived him somewhat, and parrying Amos Orton's inquisitive questions as best he could, Mark paid for his lunch and started for Folly Island. And the nearer he got to it with those blistered heels asserting themselves at every step, the more he felt like throttling this surly sea-dog Cap'n Jud and choking him into abject submission. But that fisherman wasn't built that way, as Mark realized by the time he reached the bridge and looked down at the wharf, and here he paused to cool off bodily and mentally.

And now the peculiar mission that lay before him began to assert itself. He didn't know whether the girl was here or not now, or whether Cap'n Jud had learned of her runaway plan and thwarted it or not. Neither had he dared ask the storekeeper any questions for his errand here was a most unique and delicate one. If Myrtle was here, well and good, he would find her, ask the whys and wherefores of her failure to meet him, if the letter reached her or not, and then govern himself accordingly. If she had gone, it complicated matters seriously, for above all he must learn where she had gone, or when, if possible, and without compromising either her or himself. His first move was to visit the wharf and here he saw Cap'n Jud's big dory was missing so that obnoxious man must be absent and Mark felt relieved. He looked all around, and began to hope that the worst happening was the girl's failure to receive his letter and that she even now might be at her garden or stone hut. And then he sauntered towards the house.

It was not an imposing structure this weather-beaten, paintless, lean-to shaped dwelling, yet somehow the three open-porthole attic windows, the open door with ship's figure-head perched above it and leaning outward, all seemed to menace him. Never before in his life had he felt afraid of a house; now his heart began to thump in an unusual manner. But go on he must, and like a schoolboy making his first call on a sweet-heart so now Mark stepped up and knocked on the door-casing. A very thin old lady whose calico dress hung like an apron on a picket fence and wearing spectacles, emerged from an inner room, nodded and then looked at him curiously.

"Is Captain Jud at home?" Mark questioned after bowing deferentially.

"No sir, he's off fishin'," she answered.

"Is your granddaughter, the young lady I saw at the wharf last week, about now?" was Mark's next query while his heart gave an extra thump.

And then a surprise came.

"Who are you, sir, and what do ye want o' her?" Aunt Perth now exclaimed in almost terror. "Oh, don't ye know she drownded herself, the poor, poor child! An' be you the one who writ her the letter? O mercy me," and then she sank into a chair sobbing.

"Good God, do you mean it?" Mark gasped, scarce believing, and all his foolish fear vanishing in the face of this horrible happening.

"Oh, we don't know, sir," Aunt Perth moaned still sobbing, "only the letter came. Judson read it and — and there was words — and next day her dress was found on the bridge."

Then Mark turned away, sick at heart and realizing as never before, how dear this girl had become to him.

Still he couldn't quite believe it was so, and walking away, head down as if looking for hope on the ground, he suddenly recalled his advice to her to go away in such a manner that these people would believe she had thrown herself into the ocean. It was foolish advice, even heartless, as Mark now realized, but Cap'n Jud was then the sole person he had in mind. With this new conclusion came a throb of hope. Surely she had done just as he told her in her way of going, his letter had been intercepted as he now knew, and desperate as was the step, this brave girl had gone away with no one to meet her!

And at this moment Mark felt like taking his hat off to her for that courage and saying, "Thank God!"

To the point and her playhouse he next turned his steps and somehow that pitiful little hut now seemed like an open tomb facing the sad and moaning ocean. All around it he peeped and peered. Inside was the old chair she had brought out for his use, the books still in the shelved box, and on the greensward withered blossoms and leaves from the bouquet she had arranged for him. And these seemed like the faded flowers one sees on a grave. For a long moment he stood glancing at, and into, the odd little structure he was never likely to set eyes on again, and then he suddenly spied a white card just inside the door. He picked it up and gave a start for it was the one he had given her bearing his address! Doubtless she had dropped it here by mistake and unless her memory served, was now far away without knowing where to reach him!

And once again, and more than ever before, he now realized his own stupidity in not coming here at once as Mr. Hinckley had advised.

But there was no help for it now. Gone she was, but where and whence there were none to tell. And now looking at that little white card unconsciously, and trying to follow her in her flight he recalled Aunt Perth's words and saw it all. This brute, her grandfather had taken her letter — his letter — from the Sandy Bay post office, and in his supreme and lawless arrogance had opened and read it — the plans for escape, marriage proposal and all! There had been a scene —" words " this old crone had admitted, the girl had undoubtedly been cursed, probably struck, perhaps whipped, and in her blind anger and desperation had fled at once. The only hope Mark now had was that she had not been robbed of her money by this vile and vicious grandfather, or would not lose it!

To her little garden spot Mark next turned his steps and here again was the mute evidence of her absence, for most of the flowers were sadly in need of water, and weeds were well started amongst them. Then Mark counted the days since his departure. One, two, three, four, then the letter with its one week of grace, and two days now added, thirteen in all. No wonder the weeds had appeared! And in that time what might not have happened to her?

But self-reproaches and speculation were useless now. She had gone, this much-abused girl he meant to make his wife in spite of everything; and to find her if it took years was his next duty.

But first this grandfather and a few words with him! And by this time Mark was in a mood almost to murder that surly brute.

To the wharf Mark now hastened to await his usual late afternoon return. But his big yellow-brown dory was still missing, so Mark, to pass the time began a careful survey of that spot and its surroundings that now held an almost tragic interest. The old dismantled wreck, a breakwater for the wharf, was now, at ebb tide, three-quarters out of water and peering over its bulwarks he saw star fish clinging to the weed-draped and rotting ribs. The spile wharf, a many-legged structure stood high out of water and littered with a confusion of broken lobster pots, trawl tubs and floats; the fish-house packed full of salting tubs and empty mackerel kits, still retained its mixed odors, near it wedged between rocks was a try-kettle half full of fish-oil and the long rack upon which he had seen Myrtle spreading fish was now bare of them. Evidently the perpetual curing process had been halted in this respect. The same confused untidiness was visible all about, however, as if everything brought here from sea or land had been dropped at the handiest point, and makeshift and negligence were written everywhere. Somehow, too, as Mark now looked the unpoetic and ill-smelling spot over, recalling as he did this girl at her filthy work and contrasted it with what her play-house and flower garden had told him of her nature and sentiment; the wonder was how she had stood it as long as she had! And beyond that to be almost a slave, under the domination of this brutal man! That she had been ready to grasp the first helping hand and escape it was no surprise, or even that she had taken the desperate step she had! For a long hour Mark lounged about this spot watching the rising tide, smoking, and listening to the low monotone of the ocean, then suddenly, faint above that he caught the clank of oars and soon Cap'n Jud, half upright, facing forward, and pushing them, entered the cove.

The crucial moment had come! But Mark, during the long wait had schooled himself to meet it now, cool, commanding, and without anger. He watched Cap'n Jud pull alongside the float from his vantage point on a rock at the end of the wharf; saw that grizzled fisherman step out, give a slight start at sight of him, then stoop, make fast his dory, hesitate a moment, and then stride up the wharf and halt ten feet away. Then Mark arose slowly and indolently, but with a firm purpose.

"How do you do, Cap'n Jud?" he said, his eyes holding their gaze firm and unflinching on the steely ones of Cap'n Jud. One instant of this eye-duel, then the sharkish ones of Cap'n Jud weakened and were lowered. "Wal," he queried in slow sullen tones, "what are ye doin' back here, 'n' what ye want now?"

"I want two things," demanded Mark, as slowly but more commanding; "first, I want to know where your grandchild is, and second, what you mean by breaking the United States law and opening my letter to her!"

No mincing, no evasions, just a direct body blow and to the point. But Cap'n Jud never quailed.

"I dunno's it any o' your damned business whar she is or what I've done," he snarled in answer. "This 'ere's my land your on, 'n' the sooner ye git off it the better."

"I shan't hurry," Mark responded in as defiant a tone, "and you'd best keep a civil tongue in your head. I know all about you and your abuse of this girl I've asked to marry me. I know how you intercepted and read her letter, then probably used a whip on her like the brute you are. I believe, too, your inhuman treatment has driven her to her death. There is a law in this land," he added, more defiantly, "and by the Eternal God I'll make you suffer for this crime or my name isn't Mark Mason!"

It was hot shot, fearless words, and Mark, safe in the position of a man who had honorably asked a woman to marry him, knew he could utter them.

"I want to know," he again demanded stretching himself to his full six feet "what you mean, Cap'n Jud, by this outrage, this breaking of law! That's what I'm here for and I'm not afraid of you either!"

It is said that courage gains half the battle and coupled with a knowledge of right is four-fifths of the game. In this case it was ample, for Cap'n Jud, who had never in his life before backed down from mortal man, now quailed before this one, at least in tone.

"I didn't whip her," he snarled now on the defensive, "'n' I dunno whar she's gone 'n' don't care. Ez fer the law," he added with a sideways hang-dog look at Mark, "ye kin take it if ye like but ye can't prove nothin' fer I hain't owned up to nothin'."

"Somebody else has, though," Mark asserted defiantly, "and there is proof enough to land you in jail where you belong. I'm not going to waste time and words on you now, you miserable brute," he continued scathingly, "you've made that poor helpless girl's life a little hell on earth; you've robbed her of everything even a chance to attend church; you've cursed her, beaten her, starved her, and now I believe have driven her to her death, and by the God above us I'll make you suffer for it!"

Then Mark, mad now all through and scarce able to keep from leaping upon this brute and throttling him, turned and strode away.

He believed this girl was alive, however, also that Cap'n Jud supposed she had thrown herself into the sea, and quick to see his advantage had made the most of it.

"I've scared you good and hard, you old shark," he said to himself, when he reached the bridge and turned to look back at Cap'n Jud still pottering about the wharf. "I know you don't own a conscience but you may fear the law," and then after a long glance around this spot that evermore would seem a sacred memory to him, he hurried away toward the village.

It had been a very short — and also long — four hours since he came that way but in that time his life's drama had been evoked.

CHAPTER XIV

"BATS IN HIS BELFRY"

It was sunset when Mark once more entered Sandy Bay and he now realized that he must abide here for the night. All that two-mile walk over, while his blistered heels still proclaimed their objection, he had considered this inevitable conclusion and how to meet it. Food and shelter for the night he must obtain here, but that seemed an easy matter to an experienced traveler like him,— the one thing that did vex him was whether to parry the inevitable questions that would be asked him or admit what his errand here was and possibly obtain some clue to the girl's flight. One or the other he must do, be open and frank with these inquisitive villagers or deceive as best he could all who quizzed him. True to his make-up, however, he chose the former course. There was also another reason for it as well. He meant to avenge the girl's wrongs if possible, and as soon as he could, and how better than now to lead them to believe her grandfather had driven her to suicide and to admit he had hoped to marry her. By so doing her good name would be protected and a well-deserved punishment meted out to her brutal grandfather.

"My name's Mason," he said to Amos Orton on entering that lanky old Yankee's store, "and I presume you recollect me, I was here on a yacht some two weeks ago. I've got caught here," he added interrogatively, "and must persuade some one to keep me over night. Can you?"

"Wal, I guess I kin fix ye if ye ain't too fussy," Amos responded, "we hev one spare room over the ell 'n' I'll go see the woman 'bout supper right away. I cal'late ye mout be hungry too," he added cheerily, "ye didn't make an over-hearty meal here this arternoon," and then he vanished at the rear of the store leaving Mark in charge.

"It's all right," he declared returning five minutes later, "'n' mebbe ye'd like to go 'n' wash up 'fore supper. I'll show ye." And never before in his life was Mark more glad of the chance. A satisfying though simple supper served him a half-hour later by the matronly Mrs. Orton who added "sir" to every inquiry, restored his equanimity somewhat, and near its close Mark decided to relieve the mind of this excellent matron regarding himself at once.

"I came here on a peculiar errand, Mrs. Orton," he said smiling and feeling it easier to admit the love part of it to her rather than to a man. "But before I tell that I must explain why I am here. About three weeks ago I ran into Folly Cove with a yachting party and came ashore to buy some lobsters of Cap'n Jud. At the wharf I saw his granddaughter at work and also saw him abuse her worse than one should a dog. Later I learned who she was, also what manner of man he was and a part of his history. That afternoon I came across this girl during a ramble down over the island and scraped acquaintance with her. I also met her twice after that, heard a little more about her pitiful life and — I am going to be quite frank with you now — in that short time, during those three visits I fell in love with her and later on wrote her a proposal of marriage. To-day I came here to see her again and what do you think; this old lady, her Aunt Perth, tells me the poor girl has — has drowned herself she believes!"

"Oh, Good Lord-a-massy," exclaimed Mrs. Orton, sinking into a chair, "I can't believe it! And did she git your letter, sir, do ye s'spose?"

"No, that's the vital part of it, she didn't," returned Mark eagerly. "The letter was taken from the post office here by Cap'n Jud, he read it, there were words between him and the girl — this Aunt Perth admits,— I believe that she was cursed and whipped — and that night I judge she either ran away or threw herself into the sea. I went to the island to-day, learned all I could from this Aunt Perth and later on met and had it out with Cap'n Jud, who by the way ought to have been hanged from the yard-arm of his vessel years ago. And this is the how and why of my presence here."

How this brief but direct story was received by this worthy woman need not be enlarged upon. That she knew all about Mark's previous visit to the island and the girl's history, she soon admitted, and all Mark now had to do was, let her run on and recite it. And in that recital much more of Cap'n Jud's outrageous treatment of this waif was disclosed, his name and character coupled with all the epithets proper for this woman to use, and Mark, more than ever realized how disliked Cap'n Jud was at Sandy Bay. He had also started the ball rolling in the way he intended and so fired the feelings of these Sandy Bay people, so presented the sins of this obnoxious old sea-dog, that his next reception among them would not be a flattering one. And well had he succeeded, for Amos Orton's store was the village news agency, Mrs. Orton the one to spread gossip fastest, and within one hour from the time Mark told his story, every man, woman, and child there, believed that Myrtle Baldwin, the deserted waif and slave of Cap'n Jud had thrown herself into the ocean. Also, and to add romance to the sad story, that a rich young yachtsman from the city and engaged to marry her was now in the village.

In the meantime, and unconscious how soon his story would spread, Mark had taken a twilight stroll through that fishing port, to its long and well-built wharf beside which lay a small coaster, coal-laden, another engaged in freight-carrying between here and a distant city, and many smaller fishing craft. The one industry of Sandy Bay, a canning factory, was also noticed by him, its little church and scholhouse as well, and before the latter Mark paused to recall what Myrtle had told him of her school life. He also wondered if he should meet her only friend, "Cindy," and whether it would be prudent to inquire into her history, and learn if she really deserved the name of "not being a very good girl," as Myrtle had asserted.

Returning to near the store a surprise awaited Mark, for its lighted interior was now packed full of men. A buzz of converse issued from it and above that rose the strident voice of Amos Orton.

"It's a shame, I say," was the first words Mark caught, "and a derned outrage. I never did think much o' this Cap'n Jud, allus a sulky, surly cuss 'thout a particle o' good natur in him. O' course we can't do nothin' 'cordin' to law, but if a dozen on us went down thar 'n' tarred 'n' feathered him it 'ud sarve him right."

"I'd make one on 'em 'n' willin'ly," asserted another voice, "an' feelin' I war doin' the Lord's work with that pesky infiddle. He never dressed the gal decent, never let her come to meetin', he's cussed 'n' larruped her fer years, the poor critter, an' now comes this."

"Begorra, I've allus known the baste had bats in his belfry," piped up the voice of Barney, "an' be the Powers I'd like to see him doin' the jujube dance at a rope's end an' me at the other that I wud! An' to think he druv the poor gal to her death! Holy Mother, but hangin's too good fer the loikes o' him!"

At this point Mark retreated for to enter that store, now, the cynosure of so many curious eyes, and perchance questions, was too much for him. To kill time also he now withdrew from the village and on its one overlooking hill sat down to think. Neither was he anxious to meet or discuss his affairs with anyone here. He had told his little story, it had evidently spread rapidly, was believed, and Cap'n Jud, who he honestly felt deserved a coat of tar and feathers or worse, would soon be made to feel how he was regarded here. Little did Mark realize how soon the wrath of Sandy Bay would overtake that surly brute, or in what way poor Myrtle would be avenged. She was now the sole object and aim of his existence, to find and care for her his duty, and no time or money should be considered in the matter. That she was alive somewhere, he felt sure in spite of all he had learned. Also that her flight had been so managed that no one here suspected it. To them she was now far away on the ocean bed, carried seaward by the tidal current sweeping through the passage that made Folly Island. Alone and unaided he must now search for her, leaving these honest villagers to mete out punishment to the one who so well deserved it.

But where should he look for her?

An hour or more of this useless, vague surmising, and two cigars were consumed, and then Mark returned to the store to find Amos its only occupant.

"I've ben waitin' fer ye, Mr. Mason," he said, "fer I s'posed ye'd gone off to be by yerself an' think. It's a purty bad case, this gal's," he added in sympathetic tone, "'n' comin' sudden like so, it must 'a' 'most floored ye. Me an' everybody here is powerful sorry for ye, sir."

"It's more than sad," returned Mark, shaking his head, "and I don't know which way to turn or what to do."

"'N' she was an' uncommon purty gal, too, kinder teched everybody with her eyes," continued Amos, "jest like her mother's. I've never seen much o' her here arter she quit school, howsomever, only now 'n' then on an errand. 'N' I rec'lect, too, giv'n' Cap'n Jud the letter you writ t'other day sir, 'n' wonderin' who 'twas from. I told Melindy, that's Mrs. Orton, 'bout it then 'n' she wondered too."

"You and your wife could both swear to this letter having arrived here then?" interrupted Mark for a purpose. "I may decide to take that matter into the courts and have Cap'n Jud arrested."

"Sartin, sartin," rejoined Amos eagerly, "'n' glad to do it too. We don't none on us think much o' Cap'n Jud, I'd swar to anything agin him now."

"Well, she isn't like to receive many more letters, poor girl," responded Mark sadly, to dismiss the subject, "and now I guess I'll turn in."

But he received a good deal more of it than he enjoyed the next morning while Barney was conveying him to the station and perforce had to remain an apparent listener. It was of no benefit, however, all ancient history now, and when in turn he questioned the voluble Barney not one hint or clue could he obtain to aid him in his intended search. Like the others at Sandy Bay, Barney was sure the girl had made away with herself in a moment of desperation, and that was all that could be said about it.

The actual search soon began however, for the moment Mark boarded the train he had signaled to stop there, he hastened to meet the conductor and hopeful at first began to question him. It was fruitless, however. That brass-buttoned official had no remembrance of any such girl as Mark described having been carried on his train any trip within the past two weeks or at any time. He was sure he would recall her if he had. He asserted that passengers along this part of the line were not numerous, two to three at any station was the average, and so Mark's first hope was soon dispelled. His next move was to stop off and wait for the opposite bound train, board that, and make the same inquiries. These also failed, there was but one more chance in this direction for three conductors attended to the train service of this line, and Mark rode once and a half over it, passed a night at its terminal town and over the line again to interview this third official. No tidings were obtained from him either. No simply clad girl of well-developed form, sun-tanned face and hands, appealing eyes and either wearing a man's soft hat or any kind of hat, had boarded his train and Mark began to despair. Also to feel that if ever these three conductors met and discussed the matter, he too would be considered as having "bats in his belfry."

To add to the irony of fate or luck, this second day of Mark's journey over this line was the one before Myrtle in her new attire boarded a train and started for — she knew not where.

But Mark, a good deal discouraged now and with no sane idea of how to proceed next, bethought himself of Good Will Farm and the advice of Mr. Hinckley. And in his present frame of mind that was a wise move.

"I've made a fool of myself," he bluntly admitted to that calmer man when they met once more, "and I guess I've lost the girl I wanted. You told me to do the one wise thing, go to Folly Island at once, beard this surly sea-dog in his kennel and settle matters as I should. Instead of that I, like an idiot, wrote her a letter, asking her to marry me. This Cap'n Jud got it, opened it, I've learned, there was a scene, a warm one I imagine, and the poor girl has fled. To complicate matters she followed my fool advice and left in such a way they think down there she has drowned herself, while I believe she must have gone inland on foot, for no one like her even, boarded a train on that line."

"Well," laughed Mr. Hinckley, "it's good for any man, and a young man especially, to realize that he can easily make a mistake. But cheer up my boy, cheer up. This world is a small one, these United States only a minor portion, and New England a mere corner on the map. It may take time and money, but both wisely applied will find her. Now let us sit down and go over this matter calmly. You say you wrote her a marriage proposal, and named place and time for meeting her, I assume, which letter was intercepted."

"It was, I am positive."

"And this Cap'n Jud would not or did not inform her of its contents?"

"I am certain he did not."

"To what extent did you show or assert your interest in this girl while with her? Enough so she might infer you wished to marry her?"

"Why no, or rather she might, I suppose," hesitated Mark. "I gave her one hundred dollars, loaned it, I said, and assured her I'd look out for her future welfare."

"Also informed her where you lived?"

"Of course and gave her my card."

"Any further assurance of confidence and interest in her personally? I am not prying into your love affair, my boy," explained Mr. Hinckley, "only I want to reach the basic facts of this peculiar escapade and just how and why this girl was led to take such a desperate step. Also whether she will feel justified in trying to find you."

"I think so," admitted Mark, after a moment's thought, "for all in all as I recall our meetings, I gave her ample assurance of — well, love maybe, except I didn't use the word. I wish I had now."

"So do I," asserted Mr. Hinckley, "and clinched that overworked word with its natural sequence, a proposal of marriage, which should always follow and soon, too."

"I know it," returned Mark soberly, for he had the same fine sense of honor, "but you see, this illusion, if you please, came to me rather suddenly, and not until too late did I really feel I wanted to marry this girl. First, it was a case of pity when I saw how abused she was, next of interest in her almost idyllic innocence and romantic nature, and then she is undeniably handsome. Dress her properly and she would turn most of her sex green with envy."

"I see you desired to assume that privilege," smiled Mr. Hinckley, "only it came rather late. However, I am satisfied this fair maid read your budding intention aright — most of them do from inborn intuition — and she will either find her way here or obtain some employment and then write you to your city address. A girl of her courage and given the assurance she has, will find the man somehow."

"I am not so sure of that," responded Mark, who was more pessimistic, "she is or was rather afraid of me I think, or perhaps considered I felt above her in station. It would be natural, dressed as she was and doing the filthy work she had to. The one fact I feel may checkmate that is that I confided my own origin to her at our last meeting. Told her everything and all about you and my bringing up here and she was more than glad to find I shared her misfortune."

"Good, good again!" interrupted Mr. Hinckley, much pleased, "and now I am more than ever satisfied she will hunt for you. And you are in luck also for a girl like her will make you the most loyal wife God ever blessed a man with, rest assured."

But Mark wasn't quite convinced that this winsome fisher maid would try to find him, for deep in his heart he was conscious he had held himself aloof when he should have given her some expression of love. That is, he had talked and acted like a father or brother to her, and not as lover, and she was — he now felt — keen enough to discover the difference.

And so she was as the sequel proved.

This thorn in his feelings also kept him awake that night at Good Will Farm while he alternately inveighed against his own missed opportunity or tried to think out what course she would now take. Also, as most of us will, he shook hands with the devil a few times, or rather imagined all possible evils that could happen to this unprotected girl alone in a selfish and wicked world. More than that, he now realized she was the one above all others imperatively and absolutely necessary for his future happiness. Finally, however, he fell asleep and so much in love was he that he dreamed he saw poor Myrtle slowly staggering along a woods-bordered road, faintly visible in the moonlight, and finally vanish into the shadows.

The next morning he hied himself away to the city.

CHAPTER XV

INTO A SELFISH WORLD

Myrtle had scarce recovered herself and cleared her mist-filled eyes that morning on the train ere the conductor halted beside her.

"Ticket, ma'am," he said in that money-or-your-life tone adopted by most of his profession, and the poor girl cowered before his brass buttoned presence.

"I hain't any ticket," she mumbled.

"Whar you goin'?" he next demanded.

"I — I don't know," she stammered, and then he stared at her. Something also in her piteous upturned face now appealed to him for his next words came in kindlier tones. "Well," he said a good deal nonplussed by this unusual incident, "you are going somewhere ain't you, lady?"

"I'll — I'll, go as far as the cars go," she answered recovering herself, "how much does it cost?"

"Two-twenty to B — and you get ten cents drawback," he rattled off still eyeing the scared girl who now began to blush furiously, for her precious money was safe in the bosom of her dress. Then she turned to the window, crouched low, unbuttoned her dress, drew forth the little roll of bills and handed a ten dollar one to the waiting official. Change, one dollar and eighty cents of it in silver, was handed her, he next whipped out a long double rebate slip, punched it, tore it apart, passed one-half to her and strode on, leaving her so amazed that she forgot her unbuttoned dress. That occurred to her the next instant when she caught a sideways glance from a man just across the aisle, and once more she turned away, crouched and buttoned it. Restored to herself a trifle, she began to watch the faces of those about her, then to look out at the rapidly moving landscape and back again to the people in the car, when she discovered this man just across was covertly watching her.

Once, twice, thrice, she detected him in this, not an impertinent stare, merely a sly, curious one, then she turned away and feeling her courage vanishing, watched the fields and moving trees once more. Soon a halt at a station came, some hurried out, one lady vacating the seat in front of her, others came in and away the train bumped and rattled. And once more, her courage returning, Myrtle turned and looked squarely at this man and this time he smiled a genial, sunny smile. She also now noticed he was a middle-aged man, with a chin-whisker like the farmer who had so recently befriended her. Somehow, too, that fact, restored her courage quite unexpectedly and the semblance of a smile came to her face. Surely he couldn't be a bad man if he wore a chin-whisker like the good farmer, and Myrtle took heart. And now another and larger village was halted at, more of the passengers left the car, only two got in and the next Myrtle knew this man had crossed the aisle and taken the seat in front of her.

" 'Scuse me, Miss," he said turning and smiling at her again, "but I heard ye tellin' the conductor ye didn't know where ye was goin' so I made bold to speak, ye see. Ain't used to travelin' be ye?"

"No sir," answered Myrtle, now gladdened by even this unexpected interest, "its the first time I was ever on a train."

"Wal, it must seem curis," he returned sympathetically, "an' confusin'. Of course ye know whar your goin', though?"

"No, I didn't an' I don't now," she answered unconscious of how strange an admission that was. "I'm just going to look for work."

"Runnin' 'way from home, be ye?" he next queried watching her with sideways glance. " 'Scuse me agin," he added hastily, "that ain't none o' my consarn only it looked that way. You say you're lookin' for work, what sort do ye cal'late on, mill work, tendin' store, or what?"

"I don't care," she responded more courageously, "all I want is a chance to earn my keep at any kind of work."

Then this shrewd, inquisitive and really well-meaning Yankee faced around still more. "Beg parding, young lady," he said in kindly tone, "but ez I'm old enough to be yer father, ye mustn't take me amiss. I heard what ye said to the conductor, I watched ye quite a spell 'n' I figger ye air in trouble, or ye ain't quite right in yer attic. I don't think it's that," he added hastily, "your eyes don't show it, so it must be trouble your runnin' away from 'n' ye have my sympathy. You say ye want work, how'd ye like waitin' on table 'n' mebbe doin' some chamber work in a small hotel?"

"I'd be glad of the chance," she answered eagerly, "and I am willing to do anything."

"Wal, that's the spirit," he rejoined as eagerly, "and I like it. Now my name's Barker, John Barker, I keep a small hotel, sorter summer house in summer 'n' stage stoppin'-place in winter up in the mountains an' we cud use a likely gal like you in our business 'n' give ye stiddy work. What wages would ye cal'late on gettin'?"

"I don't know what I ought to have," she answered confused again, "whatever is right will satisfy me."

"We kin fix that then easy enough," he continued, as if this settled the matter, "'n' now what might your name be?"

Once more poor Myrtle grew confused and realizing her fate and future was being taken out of her hands — suddenly. Also that she must now think and act for herself. "My name is — is Iva Stone," she answered coloring, and feeling guilty at this her second direct falsehood.

"Wal, Miss Stone," rejoined her would-be employer, "ez we hev struck a bargain I'd like to know a *leetle* more about ye. Whar ye're from 'n' how ye come to be startin' fer nowhar in particular? It's onusual ye know. Now a likely young lady like you, 'scuse me, but ye be ez any man kin see,— ain't goin' off the way you be 'thout some good reason. Is your folks like to follow on arter ye?" and this Yankee landlord of inquisitive, kindly and shrewd proclivities eyed Myrtle keenly. "I ain't pryin' into your business," he added, "only it's 'most six dollars fare from where we change cars to my town, I s'pect to pay it if I hire ye here, 'n' I don't want to be mixed up in any fuss, ye see."

The first step in self-reliance is the hardest, the next comes easier, and soon we feel fully able to take them all wisely. The first direct lie comes hard, also, and leaves a sting, the next hurts less, and before long we can prevaricate and evade with suave equanimity, and so it was with this unsophisticated and innocent girl.

"I've no parents to follow me," she responded to this pointed inquiry, "or any one who cares where I go or what I do. I want work, too, and so won't you please let me think it over?"

Then Mr. John Barker, surprised at this modestly attired young lady who carried her money in her bosom, had started for nowhere in particular, and yet was keen enough to evade his questions or answer them with dignity; now crossed to his original seat the better to observe her.

And the more he scanned her the more of an enigma she seemed. Her face was bright and intelligent, with a healthy summer tan, her eyes honest and wonderfully appealing, hair neatly combed and crowned by a jaunty sailor straw hat, while the rest of her attire, simple enough, was in good taste. Beside her on the seat reposed a new grey telescope case. All in all, a decidedly handsome and well-formed young lady, far above the average table girl he could hire in intelligence and good appearance. His keen eyes had also noted the roll of money she fumbled while paying her fare, and that one was a twenty dollar bill. So far as he could observe, she might be some well-to-do farmer's daughter going away on a visit. The business side of the matter — always uppermost with him — now recurred. He saw that she, a healthy, handsome young lady would grace his modest dining room as naught else could, her idea of wages was vague and if, as she asserted, there were none to question her conduct, she would indeed be a prize. Table girls, or housemaids, who would remain long at Conway Hollow where his hostelry was, were hard to find, his house was now full of summer boarders, he had been away to obtain more help, and all in all this Iva Stone (romantic name he thought), was a lucky find. After a half-hour of this cogitation while he covertly watched Myrtle he arose and took the seat in front of her again.

"Wal, Miss Stone," he said in quite a deferential tone now, "I hope ye've decided to go with me? It's a nice, quiet town where my house is, thar's a few young folks however, who chirk it some, your work won't be hard 'n' I'll pay ye four dollars a week till ye get broke in 'n' five arter that, 'n' stiddy work."

But Myrtle was still undecided. She had started with a vague intention of going somewhere near the city Mark was from, finding work, and when once secure in some sheltering home, obtain a day and visit this city to look for him. All this she had kept to herself as part of her promise made him, to change it now meant to risk losing the one hope of her heart, and so she hesitated.

"We're gettin' 'most to B ——" Mr. Barker continued after a pause and more anxiously, while he eyed Myrtle, "we've got to take 'nother train thar, so what do ye say? Kin I hire ye?"

"I don't know what to say, sir," Myrtle answered hesitatingly. "I — I had thought I'd go somewhere else."

"Wal, ye don't need to be lookin' fer work," he rejoined hurriedly, "fer ye won't do any better and — if ye say the word now I'll make it five dollars to start on. Is it a go?"

Two needs flashed over the girl's mind at this moment, one that of a shelter and employment, the other that she must earn and be ready to pay back all the money Mark had loaned her — sometime. And these decided her.

"I'll go with you, sir," she answered.

At B —— and the transition from train to train, poor, half-scared Myrtle obtained her first contact with the pushing, excited, and usually stupid crowd who justle one another at such a terminal depot. Here also she looked anxiously around with the vain hope that she might see the one face now of interest to her. It failed, of course, and quite grateful for so much protection she felt her new employer grasp her arm and lead her through this half-crazed throng, bumping and elbowing each other, to another train. Once she was seated in this he left her again and soon returned and handed her a paper bag containing two sandwiches and an orange.

"We have to eat ez we go in this world sometimes," he now asserted, cheerfully, taking the seat in front of her where he had placed his satchel, then thrusting a brawny hand into another paper bag he held, he drew forth two big doughnuts, a sandwich and some cheese, placed them on a newspaper in his lap and began munching.

And that act and thought of her, and this offhand, picnic sort of a meal, did more to restore Myrtle's courage and win confidence in this farmerish landlord than all he had said before.

And now, as they drew out of the city limits, and began to trundle along through the country once more, he began a cautious questioning again. Not direct at first, for he was a thorough Yankee, but by a circuitous route, as it were, with queries regarding how much she had travelled and what points she had visited.

"Ye hain't ben 'round much hev ye," he said after a few negative answers from Myrtle, " so travellin' must seem excitin' ? 'Scuse me, Miss Stone, I don't mean to be pryin' into what don't consarn me, but ez we 've kinder jined fortins, ez the sayin' goes, how was it ye come to be startin' fer nowhar, not knowin' whar ye was goin' to stop ? "

And then Myrtle showed the good sense and courage now rapidly coming to her.

" I was running away from my home," she admitted frankly, " but not from my parents for I haven't any. They are dead. I don't want to be found out either or tell where I come from or who brought me up. It was some one who hated me and that was cause enough for my running away."

No prevarication or evasion. Just a simple assertion of the facts and refusal to admit who she was or where she came from. A firm closing of the door to further and annoying questions.

" Wal," rejoined her inquisitive employer, recognizing this fact and smiling, " you're all right, young lady, and you've got hoss sense 'n' spunk too. I like ye for it. The man who ketches you will git a wife who won't blab his secrets 'n' spend her time peddlin' gossip. I'll never ax ye 'nother question 'bout yer past but if ever ye want advice come to me! Let's shake," and he extended his hand.

And so the runaway girl made another friend who was destined to help her start in her new life.

But a half-homesickness for the sea and her dear little playhouse now came as she sped inland so rapidly. How far she was to go she had no idea. Only that it was away from the sea hour after hour with mountains rising to view, nearing, and then being left behind. It was all new scenery to her and imposing, yet she sighed for one more glimpse of the dear old ocean in spite of the hard, unloved life she had had beside it. The memories of her flower garden and the playhouse returned. How her smiling posies must be now withered, and somehow, just then, came an intense longing for the sound of the waves once again and the sea gulls she so often fed. But deeper than all these heart-hungers came another regret, that perhaps she, by this hasty flight, had closed the door and lost the chance of ever again meeting the one man now valued most by her. Had she stayed at Folly Island, though hated and abused as she was, he might — he surely would have come there once more. Almost, even now, she felt as if she must turn back and return to that unhappy life to await him. It meant harsh, insulting words, curses surely, whippings possibly, but now as the homesick feeling and love-longing grew upon her, these seemed trifles by comparison. Her employer now was fast asleep in his seat across the aisle, there was not a friendly face among the few in the car, she could see the sun was almost setting and still they kept trundling along through woodsy stretches, past meadows, tilled fields with halts at stations and starts again, until it was quite dark and poor, heart-hungry Myrtle, felt that she was lost in a great world. Then her employer roused up, spoke to her kindly, said " Here we be," a stop came, he grasped her bag, led the way out, and almost lifted her into a big covered stage coach. She was his property, she now felt, in a way; her only consolation was that she could trust him, and so she accepted her fate without question. Another hour or more of uphill crawling and downhill swaying through the night and darkness, then the twinkling lights of a village, a halt before a long two-story house with double piazzas running its entire length and Myrtle was led into her new asylum, The Barker House of Conway Hollow, shown to a small attic-room overlooking a stable, by a tall, thin woman who eyed her curiously, almost frowningly, said: " Thar's supper waitin' ye in the dinin' room," and departed without one other word of interest or consolation.

And so Myrtle's new life began.

How many vexations it was like to contain and what they were to spring from may be gleaned from an observation this Mrs. Barker made to her husband later on.

"John Barker," she demanded in an acidulated voice, "where did you find that girl and what did you fetch her here for? She'll have every man-jack in the house after her in a week, 'n' even taggin' her into the kitchen!"

"Don't ye worry, Abigail, don't ye worry," responded her liege lord complacently stroking his chin-whisker. "A purty table gal'll make tough meat seem tender to the boarders, an' that un's got hoss sense, she has."

"Well, she's got you strung already," was the tart answer, "but where did you find her?"

"'Twas luck, jest a case o' bull luck," he assented, "she was runnin' away from home 'n' I picked her up on a train."

It was a foolish admission, as John Barker soon discovered.

"An' so you're pickin' up gals on trains, be ye," his wife rejoined sharply, "its scandlus, I say, an' no respect'ble gal will 'low it, not fer a minute. This un ain't, I know by her eyes, they're that fetchin'. Wall-eyes, I call 'em, 'n' she'll work 'em on every man same ez she did on you John Barker! I don't want her in the house!"

"Oh, she's all right Abigail, don't worry," responded John, consolingly. "And don't suspicion her fust go-off, either. Give her a show, we need her, 'n' if she gits flirty we'll bounce her then."

But Mrs. Barker, who like all homely women was naturally suspicious of handsome girls, was not convinced that this one was all right and watched her accordingly from that time onward. Neither did poor Myrtle appear again that night for, wearied as never before by ten hours of unbroken journeying, dizzy from the swaying coach and scared withal she crept into her narrow bed and cried from almost hopeless loneliness. Somehow she felt that Mark was now lost to her forever.

CHAPTER XVI

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE

MARK MASON from youth up had thought mainly of business and not only earning a livelihood, but beyond that, obtaining a competence and amassing enough to travel and enjoy leisure. A wife and home had not so far been a part of his plans, partly because it would necessitate an admission of his own hazy parentage, and partly from the fear that it would bar him from the all-over-the-globe pilgrimage he meant later on to enjoy.

And then, presto, a lonely and distressed damsel with fetching eyes and the kinship of a similar misty origin had upset all his plans and serenity. His first act on reaching the city was to interview the postmaster, explain his situation, and obtain that official's consent to a question-asking supervision over all who inquired for letters addressed to Mark Mason. This done and being a wise business man he next inserted advertisements in the three best daily papers offering one hundred dollars reward to the first person who informed him of the where-about of a young lady (fully described) and calling herself Myrtle Baldwin or Iva Stone. Replies to be addressed to Box —.

A copy of this he also had mailed to each paper published within a general radius of two hundred miles from Sandy Bay with request to insert three times and send bills to him.

"That will locate her, certain sure," he said to himself complacently when this was done, and then he went about his business fully believing it would. But one week, then two passed, and all he received was the bills for this advertising, and then he began to despair. In the meantime he had kept tabs on the two clerks alternating at the general delivery window of the post office, previously presenting each with a box of cigars to stimulate their memory, but no letter for a Mark Mason had been so far received by them or called for. So far as he could learn up to this point, his Folly Island fisher maid had dropped out of existence.

And then one evening while finishing his cigar and watching the crowd entering a suburban and open air theatre, who should pass in but his erstwhile friend Frank and with him a buxom and rather loudly attired young lady. The story of Lucinda Lee and her departure from Sandy Bay (told him by Barney on his last visit there) now recurred to

Mark and with it a sudden desire to learn from Frank whom he saw and what happened at Folly Island after he — Mark — had left the yacht. He had no wish to meet or be questioned by this young woman — assuming she might be Lucinda — so to obviate that he scribbled a request on his card, pointed Frank out to an usher and sent the card in by him. It brought Frank outside the enclosing rail in short order and the two shook hands as if good friends.

"Well, old man," exclaimed Frank in his offhand manner, "how have you been since you shook us so suddenly at Sandy Bay? Grinding away at money-making, I suppose? Why don't you take a summer off once in a while and spend some?"

"Oh, I enjoy the grind as you call it, just as well," returned the more sedate Mark. "How much longer did you stay around Folly Island after I left?"

"A couple of days, three I think," responded Frank, his eyes twinkling with the chance he now saw to "jolly" Mark. "And we had a lot of fun with all the girls there, yours included. Took 'em out sailing and filled 'em full of wine, a regular lark."

"Yes, I presume so, and let you tell it," returned Mark sarcastically, watching Frank's face. "I'll bet there was one there you didn't take sailing, however."

"Oh, ho, so you own up, old man!" laughed Frank. "Well I suspected you of being with her those days you cut us — now I know it. No, we didn't," he added more soberly. "You are the only one she smiled upon. I tried to get her started but the old pirate on the island interfered. And say, I'd rather tackle a buzz-saw than that Cap'n Jud again! Why he has a temper like a vitriol-and-red-pepper cocktail, he has; a regular, rip-roaring, bloodthirsty savage!"

"So I judged the day I got the lobsters," responded Mark now satisfied on one point.

"But we did have fun with some of the Sandy Bay maidens fair," continued Frank, who like all his ilk couldn't refrain from exploiting his conquests. "One of them, the belle of the town, is now sojourning here. I got her a position in a cloak store," and he winked at Mark and tipped his head toward the auditorium.

"Yes, I heard her coming and later saw her go in with you," answered Mark in slow, incisive tone and resolving to get square with Frank. "Of course your family will see that she is properly introduced to their set this fall and become the social lion, eh? You can and will also take her to all the dog-fights and scrapping-matches, I assume?"

"Ain't you funny?" retorted Frank. "Funny as a little red wagon with a green horse painted on the seat. And, by the way, that reminds me some one is advertising for information regarding a Myrtle Baldwin. Wasn't that that Folly Island girl's name?"

"You can search me," responded Mark in the vernacular and well-assumed innocence. "I've forgotten what her name was." And then half sorry he had called his friend out Mark bade him return to his companion and turned away. But he didn't leave the grounds by any means. Instead he took a rear seat inside the rail, awaited the close of the performance, hurried out ahead of the crowd to a vantage point to watch for and obtain a good look at this Sandy Bay girl he now knew Frank had lured to the city. Neither was she at all bad-looking, quite the contrary, in fact, a good, plump young woman of perhaps twenty-two, with open, smiling face, yet carrying her head with a certain unmistakable bravado and her raiment, as Mark had sarcastically insinuated, could easily be heard. He had accomplished his purpose however. He wanted to be sure to know this "Cindy" by sight, and later on locate her for a good and sufficient reason and one entirely different from Frank's interest in her.

The incident also served to open his eyes to another danger. He knew the ways of life and the city. He was world-wise to all its pitfalls, dangers, and allurements ever in wait or spread before young and handsome girls. He knew how many wolves in broadcloth and like this fellow Frank, stood ready to flatter, beguile, cajole, spend money and lure countless girls to their ruin. In this city it was almost a vocation among such as he. In smaller cities and factory towns it was only a trifle less so. And what of this fisher-maid, handsome enough to attract all men's eyes, utterly innocent of the world's ways; what if she should fall in with some other Frank Goodnow and be thus flattered and led into the gilded path of vice? She was alone, without a protector or adviser, and was so guileless that she was ready to accept his protection and guidance offhand, as it were? But then there was one redeeming feature; her life on Folly Island had rendered her so desperate that she was ready to grasp the first hand extended as she had. Then in this connection, also, Mark now recalled the story of her mother and its similarity to the girl's own. How she had been driven from home by this same man's brutality and abuse, and its outcome. Truly, as

Mark now realized, life and human conduct are a mingling of many currents, some black, some crimson, and some pure and translucent.

It had now been three weeks and four days, as Mark counted since he returned to the city, and during all that time no letter from this girl had come, no response to his advertisements, or tidings from any source. He had also during all this time watched the current of moving faces in the city streets morning, noon and night. Had stood beside the employees' entrances to all the big stores scanning the outgoing rush at close of business, played spotter in front of the few theatres now open, and all with a vain and foolish hope that he might see amid these countless faces, the one he longed for above all. But, no, and he began to grow despondent and believe he should never again see it.

And then one morning, glancing over a paper he caught the name of Folly Island heading a list of mortgages for sale. A most explicit description of this attractive piece of property was also given; its number of acres, and how several springs of pure water bubbled from amid its diverse and romantic area; one forming a natural lakelet in which grew beautiful water lilies; its secure harbor for yachts; its opportunities for fishing; golf playing, and perpetual sea winds. In fact, just the location for a summer resort or the erection of scores of shore cottages.

And then Mark smiled at the vivid imagination and excellent descriptive abilities of this real estate agent. He made haste to call on him, also, found the quitclaim deed had been duly recorded at Sandy Bay ten years previous, fenced and talked evasively for an hour, came around two days later, made a flat offer of fifteen hundred dollars for both note and deed signed by Judson Baldwin, witnessed by Amos Orton, and got them.

Then he walked out feeling almost like the farmer who found he had a vicious marauding bear safe in a trap.

To go at once to Folly Island and "have it out" with Cap'n Jud in revenge for his insults was the first thought now occurring to Mark, but that, or the spirit of revenge, soon passed away. He had little of that desire in him, only the will to insist upon justice. He also realized that to foreclose the mortgage, as he now could, and drive Cap'n Jud off the island, would not find Myrtle or redress her wrongs.

And there was this poor old crone, Aunt Perth!

But Folly Island and its heart-interest now seemed calling him, some clue, some news from the runaway girl might also have reached Sandy Bay, and then there was another matter also troubling Mark. He was not a religious enthusiast, he had little of the desire to go about spreading the gospel or to try to convert sinners. He believed in compensation, that all evil deeds wrought their own punishment sooner or later, and that exhortation was largely a waste of time. On the other hand, he believed much good might be accomplished by a quiet, diplomatic method and directing the feet of stumbling sinners into the paths of good conduct and good sense. He now saw the direction in which those of this Lucinda Lee were pointed, that there was but one outcome for her life and that, to drift downward into the slums of vice, and somehow, the fact that she had once been Myrtle's friend in the face of her situation, now became a factor with him. He might not be able to save her from the scarlet army whose ranks she was likely soon to join, and yet, it would do no harm to try, or to see what could be done for her in Sandy Bay. But September had come, the calls of new fall business kept him occupied a week longer, and then one day, or as usual each morning, he glanced into the post office box hired in connection with his ads and saw that it held a letter.

And never during those seven long weeks of waiting and suspense, had his heart given such a leap!

With trembling fingers he fumbled his bunch of keys and opened the box. The letter addressed to the box number only contained a clipping of his ad and this mysterious message:

"Sir: —

"The writer of this recently noticed the enclosed advertisement and wishes to know if the girl calling herself Myrtle Baldwin or Iva Stone was brought up on Folly Island in the home of a Captain Judson Baldwin. If so kindly notify Mrs. M. B. U., Box 62, Glendale, N. H."

Three times Mark perused this blind, yet astonishing missive, noticed its easy flowing chirography, evidently penned by a lady of education, examined the postmark, saw that it was Pittsfield, N. H., and then gave a low whistle.

"Good Lord," he exclaimed, as an intuition came to him, "can it be possible this is Myrtle's mother? It must be from her or some one who either knows her or now has her in charge."

And then he read the letter once more. It was ten minutes ere he recovered himself and would not have done so then, had not two hurrying men bumped against him in this crowded post office corridor. Then he locked his box, hastened to his office, and answered the letter explicitly.

The next morning he packed a small suit-case and took an early train that would land him at the Sandy Bay station that afternoon.

CHAPTER XVII

ON FOLLY ISLAND

A MAN may be a brute, almost, with scarcely any conscience at all or what has been rendered impervious by his adamantine egotism, and yet amenable to fear. Such a man was Cap'n Jud.

And now from the very day Mark scared him with brave, scornful words, a new, uncanny, weird, and grewsome fear became his portion. Like all sailors he was more or less superstitious and believed in all the signs, warnings, omens, and sea monsters that sailors believe in. He also now supposed this waif whom he had so hated and abused all her life had ended that life in the eddying, swirling current sweeping under the Folly Island bridge. His first visit to Sandy Bay after Mark's scourging also entrenched him in this belief, for Amos Orton, Barney, and others who despised him, had not hesitated to make known their opinion of his conduct and even assure him of what he deserved. Ordinarily he would have resented this in his surly bull-dog manner, now he cowed, cringed, and made only weak and evasive answers. He also kept away from Sandy Bay after that one visit, and when he needed anything from a store rowed four miles across a bay to Dark Harbor for it. His life on Folly Island had always been a half-hermit one, now it became more so, and he went about his fishing and fish-curing, a silent, morose, and even more surly man. Often for days at a time he would not speak to the one other human being there, his aged and pitiful sister, he began to miss Myrtle also in spite of his hatred of her, and slowly but surely to realize how brutal his treatment had been. With this also came the recollection of her usefulness, her patient endurance of his sneers even while she worked for him. She had been his slave and so considered, but now he began to miss the slave. Then, too, during these lonely solitary days far out upon the ocean where he set his trawls, or about the wharf, his first years here, his treatment of his own child and her abrupt departure now returned to haunt him. All in all, Cap'n Jud, the surly, imperious, brutal old sea-dog, was reaping the tares he had sown and feeling the Divine compensation and retribution as sure to come as the rising tide. He had scorned and scoffed at any Supreme Power all his life. He had defied and denied the existence of a God to himself, and to all others. But Eternal Justice was overtaking him, the mills of God were grinding slow but sure, and even now he could hear their wheels rumbling.

And then one night returning late from Dark Harbor, whose store he had visited and walking up the narrow wharf, there in the fish-house door he saw a white, ghostly form! Only for an instant, just its faint spectral outlines in the always open door; then it vanished, and he, the valiant Cap'n Jud who feared neither God nor man, leaped from the wharf and ran for the house as if pursued by demons.

Conscience, maybe? Superstition, surely, and his life-long belief in omens and sign-warnings. But whatever it was that he saw mattered not. That it was the spirit form of this waif and slave he now believed, and from that moment his troubles of mind increased. He began to be afraid of night and darkness and never to pass that fish-house door without a sense of fear. His sleep grew troubled, the ever present moaning of the ocean more ominous, the white upleap of waves on Folly Island would now and then assume spectral human shape, and all about and at all times he expected again to behold a faint, white, soon-vanishing form. It had been his custom now and then to use the tidal current through the passage between mainland and island in going to or returning from lobster pot pulling, now that became impossible and the bridge a positively haunted spot.

How he was faring, or the ghostly mania now pursuing him, was unknown at Sandy Bay and even his sister was unaware of it, so when Mark reached that village late one afternoon, all he could learn was that Cap'n Jud had been there but once during the previous six weeks, that he had then been told what Sandy Bay people thought of him, and naturally kept away.

"Begorra," said the plain-spoken Barney that evening in Orton's store to Mark, "but the ould shark got a pace o' my mind he won't soon forget. Shure I towld him the wourld 'ud be well rid o' him, that all the paypul here 'ud dance round wid joy to see him treadin' air at a rope's ind and I'd loike to be one to pull him up. An' jist to make him slape wid one eye open, I towld him we was all coomin' down to visit him some night 'n' prisint him wid a new suit o' tar 'n' feathers ez a token iv estame."

More of this or similar comment was forthcoming, it seemed to Mark that poor Myrtle's sorrows and abuse were being duly avenged but to what further and greater extent he now had no inkling. And then for reasons of his own Mark now decided to make a partial disclosure of his own opinions and errand there.

"I've never quite believed this poor girl drowned herself," he said to Amos later on and out of hearing from the rest in the store. "Firstly, she had no real reason to do so, for I had promised to aid her, had assured her I would find a new home for her, and while I did not propose to her then, I did so in a letter which Cap'n Jud read and destroyed.

"Now, while I do not want a word of this even hinted to anyone, much less reach Cap'n Jud, I still believe the poor girl ran away as she, I know, had planned to do. I have also set about finding her, have inserted an ad. in every paper within two hundred miles of here, shall repeat it again, and keep up the search for years if need be."

"It's curis none on us here saw that notice," Amos interrupted looking relieved. "I git one paper every day, thar's lots come in an' read it, two or three weekly papers is taken here, yet nobody read what you put in."

And then Mark felt astonished, for he had been almost positive some one in Sandy Bay would have noticed his advertisement.

"Did you know this girl's mother well," he now asked, "and was she fairly educated?"

"Oh yes, she must 'a' bin," returned Amos with sudden interest, "fer she was bright ez a button. I cal'late she got it 'fore she came here, too, fer she was 'bout sixteen, near ez I kin rec'lect, when Cap'n Jud fetched her to the island. Bad case, too, her runnin' away ez she did 'n' the baby bein' sent here or fetched. I tell ye Cap'n Jud's got a lot to answer fer, he has."

"Now tell me about this Lee girl and her escapade," continued Mark. "Was she driven to it or did she go of her own free will?"

"Oh, Cindy, she jest lit out from pure cussedness 'n' to git new togs, I cal'late. She was allus vain o' her looks, never was much o' a friend o' work, wanted to live like a lady 'n' all sich 'n' then — wal, I s'pose her dad, drunken cuss, he wan't much hold-back on her. She has a sister, though, Molly, good grit 'n' true blue. She'll never throw herself away as Cindy did," and so the gossip and scandal of Sandy Bay ran out of this Amos Orton as the acrid sap of a hemlock tree would exude. And Mark now felt that all attempt to rescue this Lucinda Lee from her downward career and love of fine feathers would be time wasted.

The next morning Mark started for Folly Island and the nearer to it he got the less he liked his errand there. He had the mortgage safe in his pocket, he knew it would never be paid and that to foreclose meant to injure a helpless old woman, and by the time he reached the bridge the "bear-in-trap" feeling had all vanished. Here also he paused to look at the swirling current below and collect his verbal ammunition. Somehow, too, he now began to recall and live over his last meeting here with Myrtle, what she said, and how she looked and acted. He could almost see her, too, her perfect oval face upraised to the moonlight and eyes tender with unspoken love and yearning for sympathy, care, and protection. Then he began to reproach himself for not returning here boldly from Good Will Farm and following his friend Hinckley's advice. Had he done so, all this trouble and pain might have been avoided. But the "might have been's" of life were not kin to Mark. To push on and do were more to his liking and he soon turned away and followed the road to the wharf.

As it chanced, too, Cap'n Jud was in the fish house when Mark drew near and emerged just in time to confront him. And now Mark was witness to an almost pitiful spectacle. He had expected Cap'n Jud would glare at him defiantly as before and answer his first words with scorn and a curse. Instead he gave a start of sudden fear, his wrinkled face took on an ashen hue and he stepped back quickly.

"Well, Cap'n Jud, you see I'm back again in spite of the insulting way you ordered me off," Mark now asserted, with an almost scornful smile. But no answer to this declaration came from the watching, cowering man.

"I've come," continued Mark in slow even tone, as if he was master here, "to look the island over again, look you over, too," he added, almost insolently, "and see how conscience and the driving of your grandchild to her death was affecting you. How is it, Cap'n Jud? Are you real happy these days? Do you realize what a despicable, contemptible brute you are?"

It was a vicious speech, a direct insult, but Mark felt like giving it.

"I ain't to blame fer 't, her doin' what she did," whined Cap'n Jud so cowed that he would not even resent Mark's insolent words. "I allus took keer o' her the best I cud, 'n' no thanks from nobody."

"Oh yes, of course you took care of her tenderly, lovingly, with cuss-words and a horse-whip," responded Mark with rising scorn, "and all the Sandy Bay folks know it and are praising you. Some of them are even starting a popular movement to buy you a new suit of tar and feathers as a token of their admiration. And a few want to hang you for the good of society and your soul — that is, allowing you have one, which I doubt."

But no answer came from the now bowed down and cringing man within the fish-house. He merely crouched lower and finally sank upon the wet and filthy floor like a whipped and despicable cur.

"You must be proud of yourself, Cap'n Jud," Mark continued after a pause and meaning to give this brute his deserts. "First you made every sailor on your vessel hate and curse you, you bumptious old shark, then you drove your own wife to an early grave by the same evil temper, came to Sandy Bay and made everyone there despise you as well, and so abused your daughter she too ran away. And to crown all your past contemptible life you now so abuse this helpless grandchild that she, too, prefers death to you! I don't wonder Sandy Bay wants to hang you! The world would be well rid of you, you cowardly brute!"

And still no answer came from this cringing craven cur!

"I've another errand here," added Mark less scathingly, and after pausing for breath, "and that is to collect a mortgage note for one thousand dollars with ten years interest, I now hold. Are you ready to pay it, Cap'n Jud?"

Then the cowering man gave another start and looked up.

"No, no, I can't pay it — never can," he moaned, "ye kin take the island, though, 'n' I'll get off, but I can't pay it."

But Mark had said all he meant to, and more too; had thrust the knife of scorn deep into the heart of this shark, and all he cared for now was to twist it once for good measure.

"No, Cap'n Jud, you needn't leave this island," he said slowly and with calmness now. "Neither shall I foreclose the mortgage as I now could and kick you off the island as you deserve. You can stay here, take care of your aged sister, the only friend you've got, and hate yourself for being what you are. You took the letter I sent to the girl I loved and meant to marry, you cursed and whipped her for that, even, and now having robbed me of her as you have, you can stay here so long as you live and think how you are abhorred by God and man alike. That is all I have to say, sir, good-day," and Mark turned and left him.

He had meant to call and talk with this Aunt Perth, to try to learn more of the last scene between Myrtle and Cap'n Jud, but somehow now he was in no mood for that. Rather did he feel to visit Myrtle's garden and playhouse once more and give way to his feelings like a foolish schoolgirl. But he did not, for such a giving-way would not help him now, he was blue and disconsolate enough as it was, in a hopeless mood as well, and to almost hate Folly Island. He merely glanced at the old brown house and down the island once and strode on toward the bridge. Here he paused and faced about for a parting look at the wharf and fish-house.

Within it, and still squat on the floor sat Cap'n Jud.

CHAPTER XVIII

"FOOLISH ILLUSION"

When Mark once more reached Sandy Bay and the four-hour wait there until Barney was ready to start on his afternoon trip to the train it seemed as if time moved slower than ever before in his life. Somehow, too, this village and these people had grown distasteful to him as well. There was no reason for it; he had been sheltered here two nights with evening and morning meals for the modest sum of seventy-five cents charge on each occasion, three people, at least, had shown him sincere sympathy in his troubles, many others had expressed it by looks and yet he wanted to be well away from them all as soon as possible. But Barney drove around to the store finally, the two hours of time and ten miles of road to the station were endured, and Mark was positively relieved when once on board a train again and moving towards civilization. And then a gladsome surprise came to him banishing Cap'n Jud, Folly Island and Sandy Bay from his mind on the instant, for when the conductor had taken his fare he paused and looked at Mark curiously. " Are you the man who was looking for a runaway girl along this line a month or so ago ? " he queried.

" I am," responded Mark, eagerly. " Why, what is it, have you seen her ? "

" Well, maybe yes, and maybe no," the official returned slowly. " Only the day after I saw you or two days after, a girl with eyes 'n' figger like you described got aboard at the next station without a ticket, said she didn't know where she wanted to go, finally 'lowed she'd go to B ——, fished a roll o' bills out of her bosom 'n' paid me with a ten dollar one. It all struck me so curious I thought I'd mention it. May be she's the one you was looking for."

" Good Lord, yes, that was the one ! " Mark almost shouted, jumping up. " Oh it must have been ! I'll get off here I guess," he added as the train began to slow down, and grasping his suit case, also forgetting the fare he had paid to B ——, he was on the platform and off the train before it stopped.

And then another thought entered his upset brain. " Where did she get off," he asked rushing up to the conductor now on the platform.

" At B ——," he answered, said " All aboard ! " and away the train went.

And then Mark drew a long breath, began to collect his thoughts and looked around. Two old ladies and a young girl were just leaving the platform on one side, a sleek-looking drummer with sample case and bag was hurrying away in opposite direction, while the baggage master was trundling his van bearing one rope-bound trunk toward the depot. Mark now accosted this official.

"What town is this?" he almost demanded.

"Burrville," was the blunt answer.

"Did you," Mark continued more respectfully, "notice a young lady, fine figure, big black eyes, plain blue dress, wearing a man's hat get aboard a train here five or six weeks ago?"

Then the official gave a chuckling laugh, "Say, mister," he said, "did you see a red moon last night with blue whiskers, or a cow with wings? Go off 'n' lay down in the shade 'n' take a nap."

And then Mark laughed also.

"Beg pardon," he said humbly, "but I'm not drunk, only excited," and then he explained himself fully. No help in solving the riddle was obtained from this man, however, and Mark next accosted the station master inside with better luck.

"I saw the gal you're lookin' for," he responded, "'n' know all about her. She was a runaway gal from some'ers, Anson Cony found her all tuckered out 'longside the track 'n' took her home 'n' sent her off lookin' slick. He won't tell whar she come from, though."

And then Mark felt like shouting for very joy. He was next told where this Anson Cony lived, almost ran the entire mile, made himself and his errand known in a few words, and then those two aged people fairly beamed, for all the world, old or young, loves a lover.

"I knowed some feller was at the bottom o' all her troubles," Farmer Cony ejaculated, after Mark had told his story. "But she never let on a word 'bout it. Just writ a little note for ye 'n' handed it to mother 'fore she left. She was all broke up at the depot, couldn't speak she felt so bad, 'n', by hokey, my eyes got sorter watery when she went, fer we'd both took to her, we had. Mother," he added, "get Mr. Mason that note out o' the Bible," and "Mother" hastened to the family Bible and produced it.

Mark in his busy business life had written many letters and received many. Some from women also but none containing one iota of real heart-interest. But this one, the first written message ever received from a maid he now loved and yet might never see again, seemed too sacred to open even before these old people — her good friends. He did, however, and this is what he read:

"MR. MASON, KIND SIR: —

"I never got the letter you wrote but Grandfather did. He was awful mad and meant to whip me without my clothes on. I run away that night and felt awful bad but I done just as you told me. I lost your card and thought you may look for me and come here. I don't know where to go but I shall never never forget you or the money. These people have been very kind to me but I don't dare stay here. I am so blue and lonesome to see you.

"Good-Bye, Kind Sir,
"From IVA STONE."

Somehow as he read this missive, its lapses in grammar and cramped schoolgirl writing never occurred to him. Only its direct, pitiful message, left here six weeks ago.

"She left her old shoes here, too," "Mother" asserted, now bringing them from a closet. "An' she must 'a' ben treated shameful. They're men's shoes. She told us all 'bout herself, too, 'n' the way she was abused."

And that evening, a unique one in Mark's experiences, was almost entirely devoted to poor Myrtle's story told by these kindly people and not until its close did Mark find opportunity to explain who he was and how he came to know this girl. "Now," he said after so much was related, "the question is, where has she gone, for find her I must if it takes a lifetime. That girl, my good friends, is very dear to me now, I assure you."

"I know it, 'n' we don't blame ye," asserted Farmer Cony, smiling, "fer mother 'n' me took to her amazin' an' did all we could to keep her. I hain't no idee whar she headed fer; she didn't know herself I cal'late, jest went on meanin' to hide herself, I figger, 'n' find work some'ers. Then thar was 'nother reason fer 't. This Cap'n Jud who brung her up she 'lowed, she cal'lated 'ud be after her to fetch her back. I'm sartin 'twas fear o' him that made her quit us fer we offered her a home an' stiddy wages."

And so this conclusion, repeated many times and in various ways by honest farmer Cony, now closed the door of hope for Mark and made him realize that he must continue his blind pursuit of his sweetheart.

"Let us know what luck ye have," the farmer said to Mark next morning after conveying him to the depot, "'n' if ye find the gal ez I hope ye may, ef ye do, jist come this way on your weddin' trip 'n' stop 'n' see us. We'll be powerful glad to have ye." Then the train came along, the two men shook hands cordially, Mark jumped aboard, and was once more face to face with the same old problem, where to find the girl he loved. But a little consolation was now soothing his vexed spirit, he knew she was safely away from Folly Island, and also clad in respectable clothing, had at least fifty dollars with her, and sense and courage enough to take care of herself. Could he have known also how firmly, even in the face of a desperate situation, she had resisted this Cindy's proposals he would have been even better satisfied. But where to turn and what to do next was the question, and in this extremity he now hied himself to Good Will Farm and "Father" Hinckley once more. His story and actions up to this time were soon told, the mysterious letter from the Glendale lady read and then Mr. Hinckley spoke.

"I should first obtain an interview with this Mrs. M. B. U., my dear fellow," he said, "for she is either the girl's mother or knows about her. It is possible, also, that the girl may be with her now and they have taken this way of communicating with you. I should also renew my ads in all towns along the railroads diverging from B——, say for one hundred miles or so. That girl's sole idea seemed to be to find work, which is creditable; she will make inqueries of some one and land in a factory town. Even now she may be tending loom in some cotton mill."

"But my ads haven't done much good so far," interposed Mark. "I made sure the Sandy Bay people would catch one of them but not a soul did."

"Well, this is a very busy world and few find time to read ads unless in need of something."

"But mine was so unusual, and a hundred dollars in it?"

"Yes, and also a six-line of fine print, probably sandwiched in between patent-medicine and marvellous-soap ads. A needle in a haymow with nobody looking for it. It pricked one person, however," Mr. Hinckley added tersely, "Mrs. M. B. U."

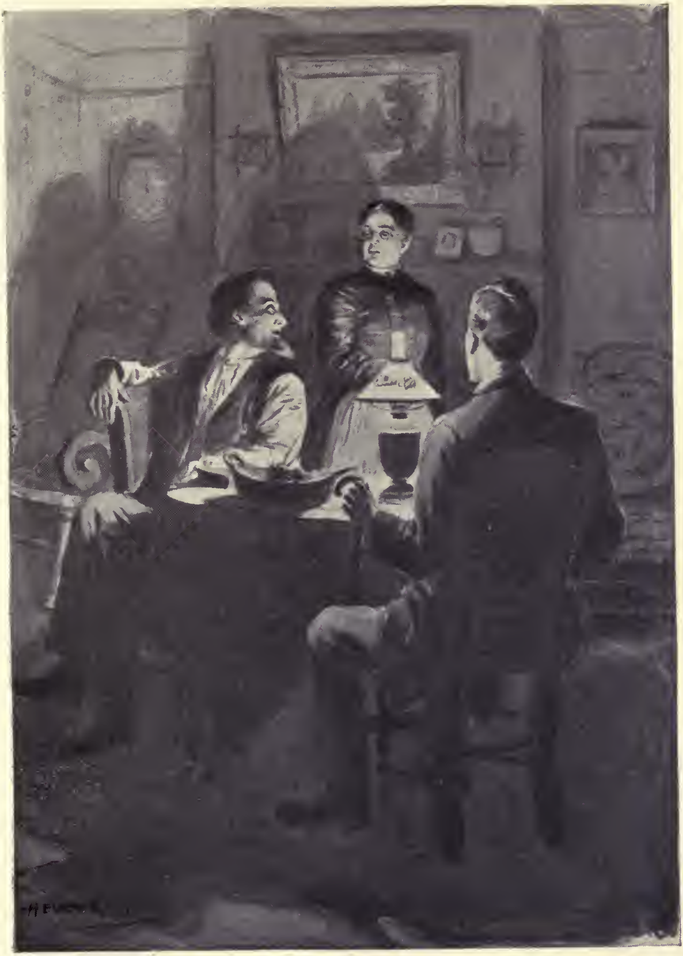
"The one thing I can't understand, however," continued Mark, "is why Myrtle never wrote me in the city. She had forethought enough to leave a note for me with that farmer who took her in, and yet there wasn't one chance in a million I'd ever get it?"

"True enough, my son, but you are dealing with a young girl's mind totally unused to the world's ways and postal service. To her your city was some vague point so far away a letter would never reach it, or she might have written to it and omitted the State. There are others also of the same name. Let me see her note please," and Mark produced it.

"That letter," Mr. Hinckley asserted after perusing it, "was written by a girl still scared half out of her wits, also hopeless and never expecting to see you, her good friend, again. An almost pitiful good-bye, as it were."

"And I guess it is," rejoined Mark now lapsing into discouragement. "I begin to think I've lost her for good and all."

"Not a bit of it, not by any means!" asserted the more optimistic one. "You couldn't even lose yourself in this small corner of a small world if you tried and she isn't trying to hide herself. It may take time, a year, maybe, but find her you will if you keep on trying," and once more Mark felt grateful that kind fate had made this genial and optimistic man his friend. He bade good-bye to him with more hope also the next morning, was whirled away by train and in due time reached the city. His first steps were to the post office but no expected answer from this mysterious lady had arrived or a letter for himself at general delivery. And now ensued a few days of really painful suspense. He began to visit the post office three and four times daily, again to watch the evening outrush of salesgirls from the big stores and the current of faces along the streets. He grew forgetful of his business interests, neglected to answer important letters, kept away from his club for fear of meeting Frank whom he now began to despise, and when one evening he chanced to see that "Injun" escorting the buxom



"Mother, get Mr. Mason that note out o' the Bible."
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Cindy now resplendent in a new fall costume of vivid hue, Mark felt that life was a hopeless pursuit of an *ignis fatuus,* and honest love a sham and pain-giving illusion. So far it had only spoiled his peace of mind, his appetite and sleep. Better by far, he now thought, to forget one's self-respect and pride, allow the animal instinct to rule as Frank did, and consider all womankind mere creatures to amuse man. But he could not do it. Somehow and someway a strain of chivalry and honest wish to be a benefit and blessing to some woman had crept into his makeup. None worthy of much of it had so far come in touch with his life until this fisher-maid had; and she, after four days of sudden and hectic interest had vanished from it. To find her and make her his own to protect and love he very much wanted; that wish had been growing day by day for seven weeks now; was still upsetting the current of his life and thoughts, and put it away he could not.

One, two, three, four more days of this "fool illusion" as he now called it passed, and then he received an answer to his letter.

It was brief and to the point.

"I wish to meet you, sir," the mysterious lady wrote, "and will do so at twelve o'clock exactly, one week from the date of this letter and in the post office at Concord. You will know me by my carrying a black-bordered handkerchief in my left hand. I may have something of vital interest to tell you. Answer. M. B. U."

CHAPTER XIX

CONWAY HOLLOW

THE village of Conway Hollow, eight miles from a railroad, owed its origin to a peculiar land formation, an oval vale perhaps a mile wide at its broadest point between two low ranges of mountains. These narrowings formed a wedge-shaped gorge or canyon above the village with sides of precipitous cliff through which ran a sizable stream. Two roads reached this fertle valley, one from the railroad beyond the left side, the other following the defile below. A flume from a small dam in the upper gorge furnished power for a saw-mill, box, and woodenware shop; below these Conway Hollow had grouped itself on either side of a wide maple-shaded street at the upper end of which stood the Barker House. A bank, two brick blocks, three churches and several stores were distinctive features of this prosperous village lit by electric lights and having telephone service; farmhouses were scattered over the plain below; while a few nestling along the sloping hillsides with tilled fields and meadows fringed by maples and sugar orchards between, gave a blaze of scarlet each autumn. But Conway Hollow's chief claim to distinction lay in its picturesque canyon above, always cool and shadowy in summer. One side, facing north, was a perpendicular rock wall moss-coated and dripping water, at the base of which a roadway followed up and alongside for a mile and thence over the mountain range to a town beyond. This, so alluring in hot months, invited tourists and lovers alike, the brook added music, and to complete the charm, just across this cascaded stream, and for a mile was a wide sloping bank, thick-grown with white and pink blooming laurel. Trout enthusiasts found this stream attractive, a lakelet at the head of the gorge also afforded speckled interest for them, sugaring-off parties near the hillside farmhouses in spring were episodes of sweet interest, the Barker House lured summer sojourners as the stores inevitably did the omnipresent commercial travellers. These, after the manner of their class, came with persistent regularity, hustled for orders, made goo-goo eyes at the Barker House table girls or any that would look at them, smoked numerous cigars with an I-am-rich *sang froid,* played pitch and poker with one another evenings, boasted of their big orders between times, and deported themselves as if the welfare and happiness of Conway Hollow depended upon their comings and goings. And here, to the Barker House with its few summer boarders doing their best to amuse themselves, a dozen regular ones — business men with no thought for aught else — and the influx of drummers ready to flirt early, late, and any time; Miss Iva Stone, as Myrtle now called herself, was duly installed as table girl. Her duties, simple enough, were soon learned, her two assistants of Irish birth first eyed her contemptuously, then began to pity the shy, innocent and willing-to-do-anything girl — and let her do it — or all they could safely shirk.

She bought for herself material and made two simple calico dresses, also white aprons, spent all her service hours from six a. m. until eight p. m. in dining room and kitchen; sweeping, dusting, polishing, setting tables, clearing them, never complaining, seldom speaking to any one, never once noticing the drummers' smirking glances or answering one of their needless comments. She also soon discovered the gorge, asked permission, and each afternoon secured a two-hour chance to visit it. Then big bunches of laurel began to deck the tables, wreaths of ground pine and red berries to depend from the hanging lamps, and in ten days Katie and Norah began to realize that Miss Stone, as all called her now, had less of the shirk element, better taste, and more perseverance than they ever dreamed.

"That gal, Miss Stone, 's a treasure," Landlord Barker announced to his angular better-half one morning — he had tried "Iva" but now called her "Miss Stone." "She's allus doin' what she ought, ye never ketch her flirtin' with the drummers, it's allus 'sir' to me 'n' 'ma'am' to you I notice, 'n' look at the way she fixes up the dinin' room, makes it blossom all the time?"

"Wal, she's doin' all right," responded his helpmate, none too well pleased by this praise, "but I'm a watchin' her jest the same. I never knew gals with eyes like her'n but what turned out bad. An' she never says nothin' 'bout herself, neither, whar she come from 'n' who she was, 'n' that don't look right. I tried to quiz her once but 'twan't no use, she wouldn't say nothin', jist shet me up by turnin' away."

It was evident poor Myrtle's fixed intention of never disclosing her past had made one enemy. And firm she was, too, in this intent and all due to the fear of her grandfather. He had been her owner, taskmaster, and keeper. He had ordered at will, cursed her when he choose, whipped her now and then, and the years of such training, such slavery, almost, were not soon obliterated. She had escaped him by one desperate break, he might and could pursue her and bring her back, he had the right, she believed; and so any admission of her identity to these strangers was only opening a door for that, or giving a chance that they would inform him who she was. Neither did she dare lisp a word about Mark. He had, in an almost stern tone, cautioned her that he must never be known to have aided her, and while she had confessed to those farmer friends who she was, not one word about Mark passed her lips — only the pitiful letter left for him. He was her God, practically; she would have laid down her life for him, almost, had he asked it, but betray his trust, never, if she was beaten black and blue to force it! And so she parried every word of inquiry regarding her past, but kept her eyes wide open to do her new master's bidding, eagerly and faithfully.

But she was not happy. Shelter she now had, work to do, but her peculiar, almost dumb reticence, had cut her off from the eight or ten people who composed the Barker House retinue. The summer boarders, old ladies and children mostly, with the few business men from the village, soon saw that Miss Stone would not talk much and left her alone, and even the landlord himself, a genial, kindly, if inquisitive Yankee, found her unapproachable, almost sulky. At first, on the train, he saw she was scared and pitied her for it, now he began to think some dark secret burdened her mind, or some grave scandal darkened her past.

Then, too, as the days and weeks sped by it seemed to her that each one made it more certain Mark would never find her. How he was to do so was also a vague problem, that he would try it, a more uncertain question. He had said he wished to help her, had done so, first insisting on secrecy, but whether his interest went beyond that, she could not guess. Then a latent, inborn, maidenly reserve now began to assert itself. Love as she had read in her books was always first expressed by man. He had not even hinted it, maybe never felt its least impulse, had just been sorry for her out of the goodness of his heart and that was all. Most likely he would soon forget her as well. He was a busy man in a big, busy city as he had told her; she a poor, ignorant ill-clad fisher-girl he would never even look at elsewhere and why should she expect him to think of her or try to find her? Then another and worse humiliation recurred to her — her birth. She knew he must have learned about it at Sandy Bay with all its shame, and that became a bugaboo, a bar sinister as it was and is to all who realize it. At first, or soon after arriving here, she had thought to write him. His office address had escaped her but it was possible that a letter sent to his city might reach him — it could be tried, anyway — she even wrote one, read it over, and, blushing at its implied confession of love, tore it up. She tried another a few evenings later, written the same way with pencil in her room, and this time her heart got the better of her modesty and she poured out her sorrows, her hopes, and love-longings, as never before, then she read this one, red-faced and trembling, tore it to tiny shreds — and burst into tears.

And then that money, the one hundred dollars, began to torture her. Mark had said it was a loan she was to pay back sometime, but how? She had spent all but thirty-one dollars of it, the rest she must save out of her wages and now she went about it. He might also follow and find her; she didn't expect it, scarce hope even and yet he might and she wanted to be ready to say "Here it is, sir," and hand it to him. In this as in his firm request not to betray him she was loyal to him and his wishes.

But a few rays of sunshine soon began to find their way into her new life. Norah, whose warm Irish heart never failed to respond to others' troubles, was not long in reaching the conclusion that this black-eyed girl's past life had been a sad one, that some dark mystery shadowed it, and before a week had passed an incipient friendship began to link the two. It started from Myrtle's almost eager willingness to assume Norah's turn in the late hour dining room service allotted to each in rotation, thus letting her escape and have the evening out with her beau, the hostler, and be it said to that blue-eyed, red-haired maid's credit, she never once tried to pry into Myrtle's past.

"Ye have some throuble ye're kapin' to yerself, I'm thinkin'," she said to Myrtle at the outset, "an' I'm sorry. But its not me way to be axin' questions. If its a felly make up yer moind the best o' thim ain't worth wipin' yer ould shoes on an' ferget him; if it ain't, thin its nobody's business," and so the subject was dropped. Norah, more practical and world-wise and seeing how innocent, how "green" Myrtle was, soon took her in hand and acquainted her with all the details of service in the Barker establishment, what was expected of servants, and also all gossip. How Katie had two beaux "on the sthring," how the landlady "wid a temper like red pepper, shure," was jealous of Mr. Barker and made life a burden for him, how "cheeky" the "dhrummers" were, and how she cajoled them out of dimes and quarters.

"Och, but they do be marks, thim fresh chaps," she said scornfully of them, "an' they think they're so smart wid their foine clothes an' the sthyle o' thim! All ye got to do is jist smoile once an' they think they've mashed ye. Begorra I got one o' them so silly lasht wake he shtuck a silver dollar under his coffee cup bekase I towld him me name an' said I'd answer a letther. Write him a letther indade! Divil a wan 'ud he git if he wrote me a dozen!"

There were other and more valuable ways in which this keen-witted daughter of Erin now aided Myrtle. She went shopping with her, helped her to buy shoes, stockings, gloves, another hat, and with native shrewdness, beat down the storekeepers as much as possible for each article. She assisted Myrtle many an hour in the cutting, fitting, and sewing of a calico dress, extra aprons and the like, and, most surprising of all, after Myrtle was more properly clad, persuaded her to go with her to Sunday morning six o'clock mass! This was the first time Myrtle had ever entered a house of worship. And a most impressive event it was, too, for the dimly lighted sanctuary with its stained windows disclosing the faces and figures of saints and angels, the severe Gothic architecture, the black-and-gold-draped altar, with life-size painting of the Madonna back of it, the golden-piped organ, the array of burning tapers, the black-robed priests, solemn chanting of Latin ritual and more solemn music, one and all awed Myrtle beyond expression. She had sat for many an hour on the outer point of Folly Island watching the great billows rolling in from the boundless ocean to break with a booming roar at her feet, had felt all the mystic grandeur of this scene, all its impressive solemnity, and here, hundreds of miles inland and in a little brown-stone Catholic Church it was reproduced again! Curiously, too, and so finely wrought a nature had this island girl, that humbly imitating Norah and kneeling with her, when she arose her eyes were moist with tears and kept so until the service was over and they left the church. And then Norah's kindly heart and perfect faith in her religion asserted themselves.

"Ah, me darlin', it does me sowl good to see yer wet eyes," she said as the two walked away. "Whin we have throubles, shure thar's no place to lave 'em loike the church. If ye say the wurrd I'll spake to the holy father an' let him call on ye, I think he'd do it an' be glad to, an' ye'd feel the better for it."

But Myrtle was too much scared at this new revelation, this strange mysticism of solemn ceremony and awe-inspiring words and music to do more than answer briefly.

"I thank you, Norah," she said, "but I hain't anything to confess or be sorry for. It was the music, so much like the ocean waves where I came from that made me feel so, and — and I ain't very happy either."

Then Norah's heart went out to her all the more.

Myrtle's eyes were soon opened to other features of her surroundings as well. The entirely new, much better and more varied food served at the Barker hostlery, clean white table linen, strangely shaped dishes, and so many of them, plated table ware, bright carpets and pretty curtains in chambers, plush-covered chairs in parlor, were all in such contrast to the wretched poverty of her childhood home on Folly Island! Her work, too, in comparison with the ill-smelling fish she had to handle so much and the filthy surroundings of wharf and fish-house, was almost a pleasure by contrast. She could keep clean, too, had a better bed to sleep in, a larger room with mirror, wash-stand, two chairs and a rocker for furniture. The double verandas of the Barker House, now screened by luxuriant vines, were cool and pleasant to sit in when the chance came, especially the upper one, the green-clad mountains enclosing Conway Hollow gave her a sense of security where she, as Iva Stone, was safe from pursuit from her hated grandfather. The brook cascading down the gorge was an inspiring friend, the mile-long bank of laurel sloping upward in the ravine never lost its charm, the wide meadows in the vale below, the hillside pastures and many cows thereon, the village green and its double rows of enclosing maples, the long street also shaded, and abutting houses white, pretty and tidy, with flower or plant decorated dooryards; the few stores with window displays, each and all interested and educated her. There was a little brown cobble-stone library in the village that Myrtle soon visited and from that time on every spare hour and often until after midnight she forgot where she was and all troubles in the pages of romantic fiction. She had left Folly Island ignorant of the world's ways, a much-abused drudge to a morose, brutal man who hated her; she was fast becoming enlightened to better things, more civilized living, more humane people, more refinement and, albeit countrified, more culture.

But Folly Island still returned in thought. Her tiny flower garden, the lone hid-away playhouse, the gulls she had fed, the monotone of the wide ocean, that fatal evening hour when her grandfather, fierce in anger and whip in hand, towered above her, and commanded her to strip and be scourged like a slave; each and all returned to haunt her many times.

A face and form, too, pursued her! A genial, manly face, with smiling eyes, seldom escaped her thoughts. She saw him as he first turned his face towards her at the wharf, felt again the shame and insult then meted out to her, saw him as he surprised her at the cove, recalled her sudden, childish desire to show him her flower garden and hut and once again came the heart-leap of gratitude for his interest and sympathy. Then she recalled the later offer of advice and money assistance, opening a new door of hope, and best of all, the wondrous witching hour on the moonlit bridge when she seemed to have just stepped into another world, etherial, glorified and with a new, tender friend to guide and protect her! All and each of these episodes and memories returned again and again to be lived over with either pain or thankfulness. They were locked fast in her heart, however, yet a part of her life even here. But no hint of them must escape her, not if a thousand whips were upraised to bring confession.

But did he, this Prince Perfect, this one man among a great world of men even think of her now? Would he ever find her and smile at her once more? Time and time again she asked herself this question, and always with the same answer, "No, I must forget him as he will surely forget me."

CHAPTER XX

THE FATAL GIFT

A GIRL of Myrtle's beauty of face and form can never escape man's eyes and man's pursuit, be she ever so reticent, or go where she will, and Myrtle was no exception. In fact her shrinking ways, her timid, almost fear-filled, appealing eyes only served to attract men the more. They had caught Mark's attention and interest off-hand, won the good will of old farmer Anson Cony in ten minutes, and led John Barker to accost her as speedily. And now in her new life and vocation she still found herself pursued and troubled from this source.

The few attachés of the Barker House were only mildly persistent, by them she soon became considered as a table girl above her station and after one or two timid rebuffs they let her alone. The male boarders also tried friendly advances with the same result and conclusion. They were more refined about it, however, and having learned how Landlord Barker happened to find her, concluded that there was some hidden mystery or scandal in her past and sympathized accordingly. Had she shown the least intention or desire to be familiar, each of them would have welcomed it joyfully, as it was, and like gentlemen, they respected her apparently unfortunate situation — after trying politely to break into it — and abandoned further attempt.

But the ones who did annoy her most were the score or more commercial travelers who came to Conway Hollow. And each and every one of these — the younger ones especially — seemed to consider that a handsome table girl could be and must be flattered, or ought to be, anyway; that she most certainly stood ready to accept any advances if tendered discreetly; was willing to meet them outside after service hours to take walks and be treated to candy or ice cream, and that such conduct on their part would in nowise injure a girl's good name. In fact it is doubtful if many of these well-garbed, happy-go-lucky, assertive, jovial, genial, and usually generous emissaries of trade, ever stop to consider that a table-girl in a hotel has any good name to protect! They have money a-plenty to spend, none to say them nay, their class reputation in the matter, or more especially that of those who are self-respecting — and there are many — is never considered by some, all these care for is their own amusement, and as for the rest of the clan, they can go hang.

It had been Myrtle's lot soon after her arrival at the Barker House to be relegated to the care of the three tables where these trade tourists were always seated, and her first experience with one of these offensive ones must be related in full. He came in late to supper, wore a suit that would echo across Conway Hollow, a last week's collar, red tie, frescoed finger nails, smelled of cigarettes, and had beady black eyes and aquiline nose.

" Vell, my pooty girl," he said, giving her a leering look as she handed him the written bill of fare, " vot have you goot to eat dis time?"

As the question was needless she merely stood, silently waiting his orders. " I vill have some steak very rare und fried eggs turned ofer," he said after a glance at the menu and a long, lascivious look at Myrtle, " und some cold chicken, fried potatoes, und coffee. Und say, my tear" he added as she moved away, " you may pring me some griddle cakes and berries, und you needn't haf de coffee turned ofer."

He was served in due time by Myrtle, who, scarce conscious of what his glances meant, merely wondered what manner and race of men this fellow belonged to, then moved away to attend to another guest two tables distant. In ten minutes or more this one beckoned to her.

"I will haf anoder cup of coffee," he half commanded and taking his empty cup she saw he had placed a silver half dollar beneath the saucer. She brought the coffee but let the money remain on the table and started to walk away.

"Holt on, my tear," he said, "vy don't you take te monish? It ish for you pecause you ish such a schveet girl."

"I don't care to take it, sir," she answered now feeling as if she had come upon a snake.

"Vell, I shall leaf it here for you, den," he returned unabashed, "und say, I vas fallen in love mit you alretty."

But the "schveet" girl let the half-dollar alone in disgust at the attempt so to gain her interest. Perforce also she had still to wait and serve him, to bring him the griddle cakes and syrup for them and hear his further insults until he left the room. She also wanted to go to a store that evening but dared not for fear of meeting this man. But he was not to be baffled so easily. Instead he, the only transient guest there that night, kept prowling around the house, peeping into the parlor and sitting room, and watching the upper veranda. It was here, also, that he, later on, found the unsuspecting Myrtle.

"Vell, dish ish great luck," he declared at once drawing a chair and seating himself near her. "I vas lonesome und a pooty girl like you ish vat I vants. Now I vish you would go mit me down street und let me puy you someding? Vill you, my tear?"

"No sir, I won't," returned Myrtle firmly and rising. "I don't know you or why you want to buy me anything."

"Vell, I do," he pleaded, also rising, "pecause I tells you I am so soon in love mit you, you vash so peautiful. I vould puy you anydings shust for vun kiss, my tear, only vun."

But this was so openly said, so vulgar and disgusting in insinuation, that even innocent Myrtle understood its full meaning. The fellow was also lost to all sense of decency, that now, as she moved away, he attempted to hold her back and grasped her arm. But young and strong as she was Myrtle tore herself away, ran to her room and locked herself in. The next morning too she adroitly persuaded the less timid Norah to wait on this fellow when he should come in and so escaped further insult.

Her next adventure in this respect came a week later and this time the man in the case managed it with more discretion. She waited on him in due order when he was seated in the dining room, he smiled at her once or twice, said thank you as many times, ate his supper and walked out as a well-behaved man should. At breakfast he was as courteous, at dinner the same, and by this time Myrtle began to think him a very nice young man. He was, too, in looks, for his linen was spotless, raiment modest and well-fitting, everything about him spick and span, while to complete his dandified appearance a faint odor of some delicate perfume was diffused about him.

And that afternoon when she (as she now did almost daily) started for the gorge to gather laurel for the tables, he followed her. She did not see him do this and was well into the blossom-laden bushes ere she spied him coming.

"I saw you leaving the hotel, Miss Stone," he said pleasantly thus accosting her and raising his hat, "and I guessed your errand from what I noticed in your dining room. It's very nice of you girls to decorate the tables so and it makes food taste better. I thought I'd come and help you, hoping that you would not mind company."

"I like to have flowers in the dining room," Myrtle answered pleased at this polite speech yet wondering how he came to know her name, " and I try and pick some fresh ones every day."

" You have an ample supply to draw on," he rejoined, glancing up the laurel bank, " and I think this gorge and Conway Hollow one of the most charming places on my route. I am a traveling man," he continued, beginning to break off clusters of laurel, " my name is Canfield, Ned Canfield, and I'd like to scrape acquaintance with you."

" How did you find out my name?" Myrtle queried in surprise and looking curiously at him.

" Why, asked, of course," he rejoined, smiling at her, " and I think Miss Iva Stone is a most charming name. Reminds one of Ivy, the clinging vine. I hope you are of the same nature?"

The insinuation escaped her.

" I suppose my name makes one think of Ivy," she answered recalling the one who so named her and coloring.

" It does, of course, and your mamma or papa, whichever one so named you had a romantic nature. Are you romantic?"

" I — I guess not," she stammered.

" But you must be, you love flowers?"

" Yes, I have to love them," she responded noticing how his eyes seemed to be devouring her, and moving out of the laurel thicket.

"So do I," he continued in familiar tone, "and I guess we are alike in our nature. Now, what do you say to a stroll up the gorge in the road? It's cool and nice up there and we can sit down in some shady spot and visit. I want to tell you all about myself," he added briskly, "and get your promise to write me. I may as well tell you now I fell in love with you last night. How and where did Landlord Barker find so pretty a girl is what puzzles me?"

But his wooing was too hasty, and Myrtle took fright at once.

"I don't care to walk up the gorge," she answered coldly, "and I must go back to the hotel now."

"Oh, pshaw, don't say that," he pleaded; "why, it's two hours before they will need you and I waited over just for this, or any chance to see you alone. Come let's go up the gorge?"

But he might as well have asked her to fly, in fact she felt like doing that now towards the hotel in order to escape from this importuning fellow.

"But you will promise to write me, won't you, Iva?" he again pleaded. "I tell you I'm dead gone on you, just say you will do that."

But he had said too much already and not another word would the scared girl now vouchsafe him. More than that, her heart was going like a trip-hammer, her face angered by shame, and the almost insult of his words.

"No sir, I won't write you," she announced defiantly, and now out of the laurel growth she started and ran for the hotel as if pursued by an evil spirit.

Later that afternoon Mr. Ned Canfield, usually successful in his gallantries, took the stage out of Conway Hollow with a full realization that for once in his life he had made an ignominious failure. That night also Myrtle confided her vexations, or the two episodes, to the more world-wise Norah and in turn received a little sage advice.

"Don't ye moind the blaggards," Norah advised, "shure dhrummers do be all alike an' after ivry puty gal they see. Some go about it loike splittin' wood, az the felly wid the rid necktie did an' others aisy like an' palaverin. They all mane the same, to git the bist o' ye somehow. Do ez I do, sthring 'em along, give 'em a touch o' blarney, make 'em think you're aisy, an' they'll lave quarters 'n' halves on the table. Shure I make a couple o' dollars or more a wake that way. If I'd bin follered by that felly you was an' axed to write him letthers, I'd 'a' said 'Shure I will, jist give me a dollar or two for postage,' an' the fool wud, fast enough."

It is likely also if these professional Lotharios could see themselves as even table girls see them, they might feel a little less of the overweening, ever-present vanity, so characteristic of them, and perhaps a trifling sense of shame. That, however, is scarcely to be expected. They will not even respect the pride of others, much less their own.

But Myrtle could not follow the cynical advice of Norah. To her a penny so obtained would seem shameful. Even the loan Mark had made her grew in burden day by day. To save it up from her small wages was her one end and aim in life now to the extent also of petty denials in all ways.

But would she ever have the chance to pay it back? Would her eyes ever be gladdened by sight of him again?

"Sometime, sometime," her heart kept saying each and every hour.

Like all of us she had started on her journey to the beautiful Island of Sometime and Rainbowville.

CHAPTER XXI

A NEW AND ONLY SISTER

For almost three months now, Mark Mason — usually calm and serene — had suffered from the most insidious unrest and heart-hunger that can afflict mortal man. A "fool illusion" he called it and yet it crowded itself into his business, made him forget the days of the week, kept him awake nights, and lost him money. More than that, it kept him on perpetual watch for one face amid the ever-moving crowds of a great city, or wherever he went. But the moment he read the summons to meet this mysterious lady in exactly one week it seemed as if a door into another world had opened and his lost sweetheart found. He replied as soon as he could reach his office, and then began the longest waiting week of all his life.

And never had there been one whose leaden-shod hours had moved so slowly. But it ended finally, and at exactly twelve o'clock on the day appointed Mark walked into the Concord post office.

A lady of medium height and superb figure dressed in excellent taste entered at another door almost the same instant, glanced at him with big, soulful, black eyes, turned away, and the next moment a black-bordered handkerchief was half disclosed in her left hand.

"I beg pardon, madam," Mark said advancing to meet her, bowing and raising his hat politely, "but I am Mr. Mason."

One quick, keen flash from those imperious eyes, then she also bowed slightly and smiled.

"And I am Mrs. M. B. U.," she answered in low tone, glancing around. "Please let us walk away from here. I wish to avoid all publicity, you see," she added as they reached the sidewalk.

"Of course," Mark rejoined, "I understand. I also suggest we stroll up to a little park not far away, as if we were two strangers visiting this city."

"That is wise," she returned, again smiling, "and I see you are a considerate gentleman."

"I always try to be, and now may I ask your name?"

"You may call me Mrs. Upson; I am a widow."

"Well, Mrs. Upson," he replied, now more at ease and hastening his steps away from the post office, "you must pardon my undue eagerness but have you tidings of — any good news for me? You see I can't wait."

"So I observe," she returned with a droll smile and another glance at him. "Also that you are what I guessed, a lover of this runaway girl. I am sorry to disappoint you," she added hastily, "but I have no tidings of her. It is I who wish for them as well as you."

"But you said you had something of vital interest to tell me, and I hoped it was news of her."

"And so I have, Mr. Mason, but I must — and you will excuse me for saying it — first ask you a few personal questions. You are as yet a total stranger to me."

"Why, certainly," he interrupted eagerly, "and I beg your pardon also for my haste. I am, as you surmised, the lover."

"And I thank you too for that admission," she rejoined as eagerly, "it goes far towards establishing my confidence."

Like all men in love Mark could scarce wait for anything, yet he now realized that he was on the verge of an important discovery only he must first make sure of his ground. He asked no more questions until their rather hurried steps brought them to the now deserted little park and to an iron settee in its most secluded corner.

"We can sit here, Mrs. Upson," he then said, waving her to the seat, "and now I will tell you frankly who I am."

And he then did in as few words as possible, only omitting all reference to his birth and beginning his history with the bare statement of being an orphan left at Good Will Farm to be brought up.

"I have been a traveling man for ten years," he added in conclusion, "also fairly successful in a business way. I now have an office of my own, do a commission business in my line of goods, or buy, sell, and have them shipped as I direct, and travel but very little. Last July I was on a yachting trip with a few friends, we anchored in a sheltered cove inside a barren island on the Maine coast known as Folly Island and here I met and became interested in this girl whose whereabouts I am now so anxious to find."

"And was her name Myrtle Baldwin or Iva Stone," interrupted Mrs. Upson anxiously, "and was she,— I mean whom was she living with on this island?"

And now the tense look, the keen observant eyes of this lady — eyes so like Myrtle's — that had never once left his face during the recital — gave Mark his first clue as to who she was. And that possibility made his heart almost leap to his throat!

It also — and now he saw his opening — gave him courage to turn questioner himself.

"You must pardon me, Mrs. Upson," he said courteously, and ignoring her question, "but may I now ask why you are interested in this girl and do you know anything about her? I have given my own personal history in full, admitted I was an honorable lover of this young lady, but how she came to leave this island and my knowledge of the matter is — well, I feel I should first know who you are or why you ask before disclosing it."

"I admit the fairness of your request," Mrs. Upson responded, coloring, "and respect your sense of caution and honor. Trust me a few moments longer and permit me to ask you one or two more questions. I notice you wear a Knight Templar charm. Are you a Mason?"

"I am, Mrs. Upson, and no man would dare wear that emblem of Knighthood unless he had the right, I assure you."

"And I have been informed that all Masons are in honor bound to protect and care for the widows and orphans of brother Masons," she continued eagerly, "and can be trusted by us?"

"We most certainly are," Mark rejoined feeling proud of that world-wide and admitted fact. "All the fraternity are bound together and obligated by the most solemn and sacred vows to do that very thing. In fact that duty and bond is one of the corner stones of Masonry and has been for thousands of years. It is a survival of the age of chivalry when gallant knights considered protection of womankind a part of their religion. I am a Mason of high degree," he continued warming to the subject, "the thirty-second, and proud of the fact as well. Now may I inquire why you ask?"

"Certainly," she responded with due meekness and smiling. "I am the widow of a thirty-second degree Mason myself, and my husband had the honor of filling the master's chairs in several of your bodies. Now will you trust me a little further and tell me about this girl — I am sure you love honorably? If she proves to be the one I surmise, I will then tell you who I am and why I wrote you. I ask this confidence of you as the widow of a brother Mason."

"I cannot refuse your claim," Mark rejoined, now impressed by her earnestness and watching her closely, "and have no wish to do so. Only this girl's history, good name, and fortunes are so near and dear to me that I felt the need of extreme caution. She, this Myrtle Baldwin, is the granddaughter of a Cap'n Judson Baldwin who owns Folly Island and the worst-tempered old sea-dog I ever met. This girl, brought up by him and a spinster sister, was neglected, abused, barely educated to read and write, made to do the filthiest and hardest work, whipped occasionally, and denied even decent clothing. I saw her at her work, heard her cursed and insulted, heard her story from her own lips and took pity on her. More than that, in three days' time I fell in love with her. I found also she meant to run away. I advised her how best to do so, assured her of my assistance in finding a home, gave her money to escape with, and left her to await my instructions by letter. I soon decided where she'd best go for a time, to Good Will Farm, wrote her as promised, including a proposal of marriage, and awaited her escape from the island. The letter was taken and read by this brutal grandfather as I've learned, she was cursed, (and I imagine) whipped by him and ran away. Where to, God only knows. I've traced her to the city of B—, have advertised far and wide, and that is all I can say and the whole story except that in our discussion of the runaway plan I advised her to assume the name of Iva Stone. Now Mrs. Upson, as a man of honor and a Mason permit me to ask who you are?"

And now came the crucial moment in this woman's life!

Not for once during that recital had her deep, dark, soulful eyes left Mark's face. Every word he uttered had been watched and waited for as if a life depended on it, while she scarce breathed. Her hands clasped in her lap seemed trying to tie themselves into a knot, lips firm set, face tense and eager. One instant only did she now hesitate, then all the years of her shame, sorrow, heartache, and humiliation were uttered in a low whisper.

"I am that girl's mother, God forgive me!" she answered.

Then she bowed, covered her face and burst into tears.

There are some moments in life too sacred for the eyes of another. This now seemed such a one to Mark and he turned away.

"Calm yourself, my dear lady," he exclaimed a moment later, "and let us rejoice that we have met. I felt almost sure who you were, and I thank God I've found you. Now we can work together as one."

"But how can you respect — what must you think of me," she queried, raising her face, "me a mother, to send my babe, no, carry it there, and leave it where I knew love would never come to it? How can you or any man of honor and manhood forgive that?"

"I judge not lest I in turn be judged," he answered courteously. "All sins in this world carry their own lash and if you have wronged this child you have wronged yourself as well and paid the penalty. It is not for me to say or gainsay one word. Let the dead past bury its dead."

"But you shall hear my story," she exclaimed now brightening, "aye, every word for you have earned the right. I was that Cap'n Jud's only daughter and taken to Folly Island when fourteen years old. I, too, became his drudge and slave, was cursed, and starved for love. I never knew what a mother was, for mine died when I was two years old. I, too, grew desperate at my hard, lonely lot on that barren island with the sea forever moaning. I, too, ran away, met a man — no a scoundrel! I was young, innocent, confiding, and believed he was a single man and telling me truth. I was also so alone and helpless that I consented to a marriage after knowing him but two weeks. Then he took me to your city, established me in a pretty flat, and for six months I lived in a fool's paradise to end in my learning that the name he married me under was an assumed one, that he had a wife and family and that I was a duped and betrayed girl. Then came a scene every word of which is burned into my memory, and all the satisfaction I got was to have a roll of money thrown at me, almost, and told to shift for myself. I did, too, I left the city, obtained work and two months later sought refuge in a maternity hospital where my baby was born. Here, too, I found friends who listened to the story of my wrongs and following their advice I, later on, took the child to Folly Island, and through them a few months afterwards, obtained a position as assistant in another hospital. There I lived, worked, and studied for ten years, and became a competent nurse. Here also I met Mr. Upson, a widower much older than I, who had been brought to this hospital to undergo a serious operation. I was given the case; for weeks and weeks his life barely hung by a thread, with many a stretch of two and three days' watching by me while I never once closed my eyes in sleep. We saved his life, however, and when convalescent he asked me to marry him and care for his children as well. I told him my story in full, it did not alter his wish, and then we were married. He lived only about five years, I was left well provided for, and am doing my best to be a mother to his two children, a boy and girl now grown up. My home is in a small town many miles from this city, it would have provoked no end of gossip had I met you there, and so I asked you to come here."

"I thank you for your confidence," Mark rejoined, after her recital of this not unusual story, "and there is no need of my assuring you it shall never be lisped by me. There is only one question I wish to ask, and that I ask as a Mason, and because it may come within my power to mete out a tithe of punishment to the scoundrel who so wronged you. I would like to know his name."

"His name is Harry Graham Goodnow," she answered slowly, "and a well-known business man, I believe, in your city."

"Harry Goodnow, good Lord!" exclaimed Mark in utter astonishment, "why I know him and it was his son Frank who owns the yacht I went to Folly Island on! Well, well, well, how our sins do find us out in this world!"

Then the two looked at one another long and earnestly, for a new faith and new hope now linked their hearts and lives. To both also the sun now seemed to shine a little brighter for ahead of them lay a mutual duty yet to do, and a life yet to join with theirs.

"My dear Mrs. Upson," Mark now exclaimed, suddenly drawing forth his watch, "do you know what time it is?"

"No, nor care," she answered returning the smile, "the only thing I do know is that kind fate has brought me a friend and brother whom I feel I can trust."

"And so you can," he rejoined proudly, "as long as I live and am sane. In the meantime it's two-thirty. I am nearly starved so let us hunt for dinner."

Then he arose, escorted her to the one most excellent hotel of that city, "The Eagle," showed her into its parlor, descended to the office and wrote "Mark Mason and Sister," on the register.

"Dinner only," he said to the urbane clerk, "my sister and myself are merely stopping off here between trains."

CHAPTER XXII

"YE DRUMMER"

"AND now, Mrs. Upson," Mark observed after they had dined and once more returned to "The Eagle's" cozy parlor, "how much time have we and when do you wish to return to Glendale?"

"I must go back on the last train to-day," she answered smiling at his direct business way.

"Then you have two hours and eighteen minutes, exactly," after a quick glance at his watch, "and I suggest we remain here. It's more secluded and more comfortable."

"I am agreeable," she rejoined, accepting his implied invitation and seating herself in one of the luxurious chairs. Then added "you seem quite at home in a hotel, Mr. Mason?"

"Of course, I've lived in them continuously for ten years you know, and —" drawing another chair around to face her —"I ought to feel at home in them."

"Oh yes, I remember you said you had been a traveling man. Do you know," she continued looking curiously at him, "I've always had a bad impression of — of men of your calling? You must excuse me but they are considered as — rather lacking in moral character. You seem to be, however, a most laudable exception."

"No, not an exception by any means, rather a fair average of the better and more sensible ones among us commercial men. The facts in the case, Mrs. Upson," he continued earnestly, "are that the character, ability, and average good-citizenship of the traveling fraternity to-day are far better than the general public give them credit for. It wasn't always so, I admit. There was a time, many years ago, when this method of selling goods by sample first began, that the men attracted by it were not all they should have been in character. A class of rounders, as it were, a happy-go-lucky set familiar with all the cardinal vices and indulging in them without regard to name, fame, or their own self-respect. They, being far removed from home influences, no one knowing their names or whence they came; seemed to feel they could cut loose, as it were, and ignore all social and moral obligations. Then with plenty of money to spend, all the doors of vice wide open for them and most of the others closed, it's no wonder they achieved the reputation they did. To-day it's different, however, for the inflexible law of survival of the fittest has entered into our ranks, the wholesale houses or manufacturers have found they could not afford to employ men who drank, who gambled, and who pursued worse vices, and one by one the sports and rounders were called in and relegated to less responsible positions. One by one, also, a better and more sensible class of men have taken their places, and so the evolution has gone on. Then this weeding-out process, this separation of the sheep from the goats began also from the other side in the way of competition among traveling men. Those who retired at a reasonable hour and sober, arose early and hustled, inevitably got ahead of those who didn't and secured the most orders. Merchants also found these better-behaved ones were best to buy from, the moral sympathy that permeates all classes influenced them, and those who behaved best obtained the largest orders and most consideration. It has been a long, slow, uphill evolution, yet as inflexible as the rising of the tides, and to-day the traveling men as a class, are the equals of any profession in moral character, self-respecting conduct, and good sensible behavior. More than that, so well recognized is their ability that, take them as a whole, they earn and are paid more money than the average of doctors, lawyers, or clergymen.

"But," continued Mark smiling at Mrs. Upson in a contemplative way, "we still have to bear the odium of our predecessors, we still are like Poor Tray perpetually whipped for having once been found in bad company, and yet there is no justice in it! It's a case of once call a dog a bad dog and a bad dog he remains ever after. I have been one of the fraternity, as I said, ten years. I have watched and studied them well, and while there are a few black sheep among us still, they are exceptions and seldom remain with us many years. In fact they absolutely can't for the grind of competition inevitably weeds them out."

"I am more than pleased to hear the inside history of your fraternity," Mrs. Upson now rejoined, "and it has been an enlightenment. Living in a small village as I have since my eyes were opened to the world's ways and — pardon me — the iniquities of men, I have naturally accepted a village verdict on your class. And now, my friend, as I feel I can call you, what do you advise and how shall we go about the solution of this mystery and find the poor girl you at least have a claim upon?"

"And haven't you as well?" returned Mark quickly. "To my mind, you have the deepest and holiest claim, that of a mother."

"But she may not recognize it," Mrs. Upson responded sadly. "I forfeited that right by my own heartless act and God only knows why I did it! She, that helpless babe, did not seem my own but the curse that scoundrel, Goodnow, had laid upon my life. I was almost insane then from shame and humiliation, and the world seemed an accursed place where I must starve. A home was offered me in the hospital and chance to earn a livelihood if I could or would relieve myself from the encumbrance of a child. I was also advised to place it in an asylum, but feeling as I then did, I took the poor helpless babe to Folly Island for two reasons, one that I must get rid of her to obtain the position open to me, the other an unholy wish to avenge myself for being driven from home by my father. It's no excuse for my own heartless conduct, God only knows how I have suffered to pay for it, and now the one and only object of my life shall be to make amends, to find that poor, motherless child of mine and beg forgiveness on my knees," and once more the tears came to this unhappy woman's eyes.

But Mark, sensible business man that he was, soon smoothed them away.

"Retrospection is worse than useless, my dear sister," he said soothingly, "and grieving over bygones as much so. A young girl in your situation then, almost insane from the wrong done her can never be really blamed for any action short of murder. Now we will find Myrtle, you and I, if we live long enough, and,"— smilingly,— "maybe we can persuade you to join home-making with us and refute the proverbial mother-in-law sneer."

And then once again the eyes of "dear sister" grew misty.

"I feel encouraged," Mark continued buoyantly, "I've now got a keen-witted woman to advise and aid me in this search and shall continue it with more hope of success. Now what in your opinion should be our next move?"

But the question was a poser, as it would have been to anyone.

"I am as much in the dark as you, my dear friend," Mrs. Upson responded after a long, contemplative pause. "Knowing my child's nature, or what it must be, she inevitably followed your advice as to the matter of earning a living. How much and in what way did you advise her?"

"Why, to go to some country village," he replied, trying to recall just what he had suggested. "I think I suggested that she obtain some chance to do housework temporarily. That was about all she was fitted for; I also advised her to change her name and to beware of men's flatteries."

"Then that is just what she has done," interrupted Mrs. Upson, "and my idea is she must be now at some secluded farm-house where papers are seldom read. It is curious, too," she added musingly, "we take two daily papers, one of your city's best, also two weekly ones, yet I never saw your advertisement and would never have heard of it had it not been for the name Iva Stone. A friend of mine living in another State whose name was also Iva Stone sent me the clipping as a joke on herself, and I can assure you it made me gasp for breath! Later I found it in our local paper, in a two weeks' old issue."

"Well that is curious," ejaculated Mark, "a blind shot in the dark that scored, and my selection of that name was suggested by a stone playhouse built by your child in her loneliness, on one side of which grew an ivy vine. The question now is, however, where shall we look for her."

"Oh, I don't know!" sighed Mrs. Upson as the almost hopeless nature of this task again asserted itself. "All I can see is to continue the advertising and offer of reward. I would advise, also, sending a few small posters to every country village within the radius of her possible journeyings. I've seen them often in our village post office, rewards for stolen horses, escaped criminals, and the like."

"That seems a wise suggestion," Mark responded eagerly, "and I'll do it at once. My God, we've got to find that girl, cost what it may!"

For a half-hour more this mutual duty and how best to carry it out, was discussed with all its pro's and con's and then Mark recurred to his own feelings and how he came so suddenly to fall in love with this unhappy fisher-maid. Her hard-worked life on Folly Island was described; Sandy Bay's interest in her and dislike of Cap'n Jud as well, Barney and his "bats in belfry" witticism recalled, and then Mark again returned to the more pertinent subject of his own meetings with Myrtle and first impressions. All the details of this romance, his first sight of her, how she was clad, and how Cap'n Jud threw a bloody split fish at her were described; his own jaunt over the island that afternoon, the finding of the flower garden and stone hut, then the girl herself were all gone over and enlarged upon. It was the lover now speaking and living over every hour of the first-love romance, and how his heart opened with a sudden burst of love that swept all personality aside! Even the moonlit meetings on the bridge were admitted and described and how man-like he longed to clasp this fair maid in his arms.

"I couldn't quite do so," he declared at this juncture. "Somehow she seemed so innocent, so pure, so confiding in me, I feared to shock her by an attempted embrace. Ah me, I wish I had now, and then gone to Cap'n Jud the next morning and demanded this girl for my wife and so saved her from this desperate step. I even had the chance two days later and was so advised by my dear old friend, Mr. Hinckley, and then didn't! All in all and reviewing my own conduct I feel I am almost entirely to blame for this situation."

"No, I cannot agree with you," returned Mrs. Upson sadly. "A wise man does not rush headlong into matrimony, and you could not foresee my father's high-handed act and interception of your letter. The one and only guilty person in this unfortunate matter is myself, by my cowardly desertion of my own babe."

But time flies fast when two persons are exchanging heart-histories, and now Mark, from a travelling man's force of habit, suddenly consulted his watch.

"My dear mother, as I hope to call you some day," he exclaimed, "your train will leave in just twenty minutes."

And so ended this meeting and consultation.

But Mark felt as he said, that a mother — albeit a fairly young and charming one — had suddenly entered his horizon, and so impressed was he by her sincerity and womanly feeling, that her face haunted him all the way back to the city. While she — well, let any woman whose life has been so wrecked answer the question.

Nothing had been accomplished, however, towards solving the problem, as Mark now realized. He was still in the dark, and while by an almost miracle he had found Myrtle's mother, the girl herself, that poor, homeless, almost helpless waif, was lost in a great world of strangers.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FEW FRIENDS

There were some amenities, some shreds of kindly interest and sympathy that in due time came to Myrtle at Conway Hollow. The keen-witted, but kind-hearted Norah, became her nearest friend and adviser. First in the matter of simple but much needed raiment and visits to the stores. Then to early mass in which Myrtle found an unexpected solace and mysterious effect upon her feelings. Religion and its ceremonies were all new to her, the very fact that her grandfather had scoffed at it and church-going created interest in it, even as a child is induced to try forbidden paths. But Norah was quite broad, in a way. To her any church was worthy of consideration and while her own was undeniably the right one, the two others in the village were well worthy of being visited.

" Shure prayers do be heard in one church as aisy as in another," she said when Thursday evening, first bell call came again, " an' as we both have this avenin' off, let's go to the prayer meetin'," and go they did and again the following week. But Sunday morning service, except to early mass with Norah, was denied to Myrtle. Her hours of work were all fixed and every third evening after eight o'clock and each afternoon from two until five was all the time she could call her own at the Barker House. And it was during one of these three hours of afternoon freedom that she made another friend.

There were among the summer sojourners here a Mrs. Davis and daughter from a southern city and the younger one an almost helpless cripple, at least so far as walking went. She was a sweet, patient girl of about eighteen, who had received a spinal injury during babyhood and had never afterward regained the full use of her lower limbs. She could walk by hitching along, half supporting her frail body with canes, and that was all. Her one talent, outside of her uncomplaining acceptance of her fate, was an ability to draw and paint well, and every fair day found her at it. Myrtle's first acquaintance with her began in the gorge, into the entrance of which this crippled girl stationed herself each afternoon, to paint a picture of it while the slanting sun's rays were just as wanted. To Myrtle, also, her art was a wonderful one, and to watch the growth of the gorge's jagged, moss-coated wall, its overleaning trees, narrow roadway, and cascading brook on canvas, was a most fascinating occupation. Then, too, Myrtle's sympathies were aroused by this almost helpless girl's condition, and to assist her going and coming was an imperative impulse. Her first act of kindness was to take the rocking-chair from her own room one afternoon and carry it to this girl to use, and return to fetch it after her work was done. A little friendship soon sprang up between the two, and while Myrtle, as always, so far kept her own history to herself the crippled girl was more than glad to disclose her own and explain her art as well. Then, too, she had a most idyllic nature and sympathetic appreciation of all that was poetic and beautiful in the world about her. To her a laughing brook was a subject to exclaim upon and its music the sweetest of melodies. A bird singing in a deep thicket woke her soul, a bunch of laurel flowers bending to kiss the brook's current brought a rapturous expression, and the never-ceasing whisper of the pines a mist to her eyes. Such a sensitive, sentimental soul in such a crippled body inevitably appealed to poor lonesome Myrtle as naught else could, and in a short time the two became firm friends. And then one day an incident occurred that added to the bond.

The two were, as always now on each pleasant afternoon, together in the gorge, the frail one deeply intent on her work and Myrtle watching her, when one of the usual quick-rising mountain-region showers came up. Neither noticed it until the gorge began to darken and a rumble of thunder warned them. Then Myrtle looked up to see an ominous black cloud closing over the gorge. A flash of lightning came the next instant, a roar of wind over the spruce-clad cliff far above them followed, with the quick patter of big raindrops in the brook close by. There was no shelter in the gorge, the hotel was four hundred rods or more away, and Myrtle saw it meant a drenching for the crippled girl or else she must carry her to shelter. There was no time to look around or discuss the matter, it was act at once or be soaked by the downpour, and Myrtle, conscious of her young, splendid strength, waited not for permission but picked the helpless girl up, picture and all and started to run for the house. She was breathless when she reached shelter with her hundred-pound burden, just in time and so exhausted that she collapsed on the porch floor. But she had saved her new and frail friend from an ice-cold drenching that might have been serious.

And that night the girl's mother, (a proud-spirited, southern woman, who looked upon "help" as her ancestors did upon slaves) opened her heart to Myrtle.

"Please come to my room after your work is done," she said to Myrtle quite graciously. "I desire to thank you more properly for your heroism this afternoon. I feel you may have saved my child's life."

And poor, lonely Myrtle felt as if a mother had addressed her!

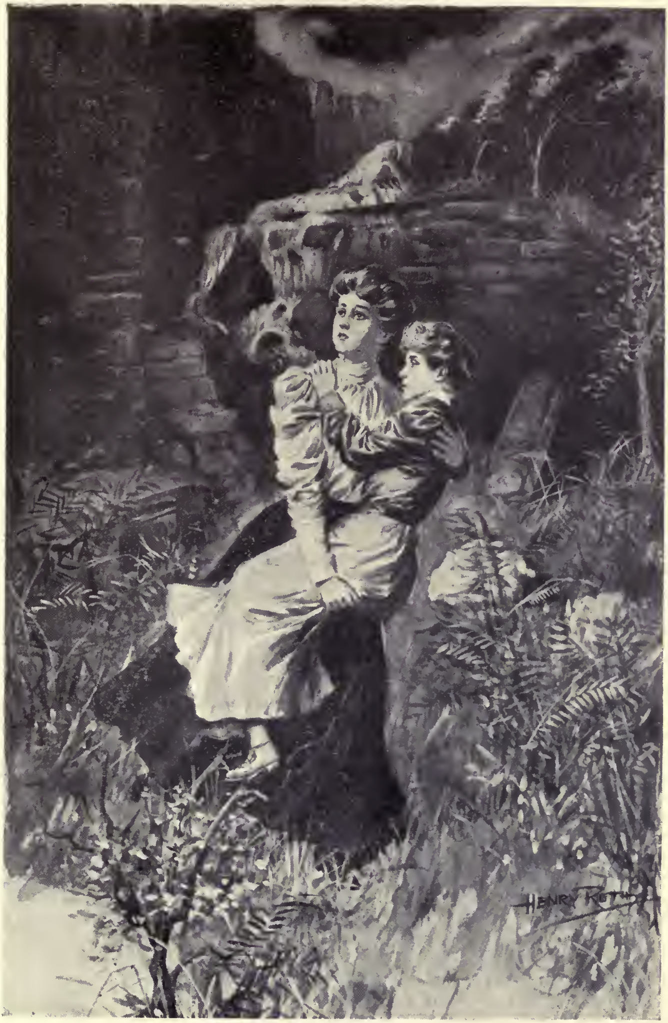
A cheerful fire blazed in Mrs. Davis's room, the best front one, when Myrtle entered, for the early September evenings now needed it, that lady herself in richly embroidered negligee, arose from the depths of an easy chair to meet her, her daughter also advanced from another and Myrtle — merely "help" heretofore — now felt herself received as a person of consequence.

And then Mrs. Davis did a most gracious thing; for clasping the surprised Myrtle, she kissed her once, twice, thrice.

"To reward you for your act of love and devotion, my dear," she said quite tenderly, "and now draw a chair up to the fire and tell me how you came to take so much interest in my Virginia, and all about yourself."

When a Grande Dame unbends she does so all over, and this was true in the case of Mrs. Davis, daughter of an Ex-Confederate Colonel, and a member of one of the "First Families of Virginia."

"I hear you ran away from home to secure work," she continued resuming her seat, "and I notice you



It was act at once. — *Page 269.*

always conduct yourself like a modest young lady in the dining-room. Really, I've grown quite interested in you, Miss Stone, and wish to be your friend."

"I try to keep my place and do all I am paid to do," Myrtle answered wishing she dared confide her past to this august lady. "I am only hired help you know."

"So I assume," rejoined Mrs. Davis graciously, "but that is no reflection on you. A lady can be a lady while serving in a dining-room, as well as receiving in a parlor, and your behavior denotes the inheritance of gentility. I notice also that you are very non-communicative. No one here seems to know where you came from or aught of your past and I respect you for keeping your own counsel. Few in this world do."

But Myrtle who had now kept herself to herself strictly for over seven weeks was not thawed out easily, as Mrs. Davis saw, and, tactful woman that she was, she at once shifted her ground and began to relate something of her own history and how her child became crippled. That girl's art and its fascination was next alluded to, how the pastime had been a blessing, and in what way.

By this time Myrtle's diffidence began to wear away and she joined in the conversation with ease and interest. What was said during this first half-hour of visit is scarce worth quoting and then this tactful lady, having put her caller at ease asked an adroit question.

"Miss Stone," she said very sweetly, "I have noticed you seem somewhat superior to your station, and — pardon my personal interest in yourself — but it seems strange you should have taken up table work in a hotel. How came you to do so?"

For a moment Myrtle hesitated at this direct question, an inquiry she had evaded many times. But somehow this smiling gracious lady, and the warm, cozy, homelike room, all invited confidence and she was hungering for love and sympathy.

"I came here," she answered after a pause, "because it was the first chance I had for work after I — ran away."

"And so you ran away from home," queried Mrs. Davis now keenly interested, "pray tell me why did you do so?"

"I had to," Myrtle asserted now resolving to make a clean breast of it. "I never had a father or mother I knew, I was brought up on an island by my grandfather and he hated me, I had to do only dirty work at a fish house most of the time, never had clothes fit to be seen in, and he swore at me and whipped me sometimes, so I ran away."

"And you never knew who your mother was?" queried Mrs. Davis surmising the truth at once. "Do you know whether she is living or not?"

"No," returned Myrtle, coloring and stammering, "I — I only know she ran away from the island because grandfather abused her and — and — I was fetched back by — some one."

It was all confessed now. The dread secret exposed, the skeleton bared, and poor Myrtle, the waif and stray bowed her head with shame and humiliation.

"I didn't mean to tell you or anybody in my life," she added miserably, "and I hadn't ought to for its an awful thing to own up. But I am so lonesome here, I have nobody I can trust and — and I want some friend."

"Indeed you do, my poor child," rejoined Mrs. Davis warmly, "you need a friend and a mother also God knows, and my heart goes out to you. I have for some time surmised you were concealing a dark past. Mrs. Barker said as much, but you need have no fear, Virginia and I will never betray your confidence, and when I saw you bearing her to shelter before the coming storm this afternoon I said I should befriend you for it if I could, and I shall. Now have no fear, tell me all about yourself and your troubles, my dear girl, and let me be your friend."

And then for the first time, before others, in seven long weeks of self restraint, Myrtle gave way to her feelings and cried like a child.

She recovered herself after a brief outburst of tears, and then the tide of confession and confidence came forth in full flow and for an hour Mrs. Davis and her crippled daughter sat spellbound, while they listened to Myrtle's pitiful story and desperate flight from Folly Island. Sandy Bay, the few years at school, her one friend, Cindy, the little flower garden, big playhouse, and all her hours of air castle building and meditation there were included. Her barren and love-denied home life was also described, Aunt Perth as well, and the long, cold winter imprisonments with the sea forever moaning and bellowing were portrayed as only she could portray them. Mark and his influence and aid were all she omitted. The coming of this Prince Charming and the sweet illusion of first love were too sacred for admission, for not even this gracious lady and all Myrtle's hungering for sympathy and friendship could drag that from her.

"I feel so alone and helpless I haven't dared trust any one," she added in conclusion, "and the worst dread of all is having the shame of my birth found out. I can earn my living, I am sure, I wouldn't mind if I had to almost starve, go without decent clothes or even be whipped again as I once was; but to have folks learn I was the hateful thing my grandfather often called me — well, if it was known here I should kill myself, that is all. Norah has been good to me (the only one here who has until you were), Mr. Barker has been fair and kind but Mrs. Barker hates me, why I don't know for I've always behaved myself, never let men tag after me, and tried to earn my wages. Why is it, can you tell me?"

"Oh, merely petty jealousy, my dear child," returned Mrs. Davis, smiling into Myrtle's still teary eyes, "and I wouldn't notice or even think of it if I were you. You have the two blessings she most envies, youth and good looks, so let that console you. Also, and as long as your conscience is clear and you conduct yourself as I am sure you do, rest assured she can't harm you. As for the other matter that troubles you, it is largely an imaginative one and were it to become known here, which is unlikely, it would awaken more pity than contempt, and you would still be judged by your own behavior rather than the accident of your birth. I thank you, too, for your confidence, Iva — you must let me call you so now — and you must come to me whenever you have a spare hour. There is also another favor I ask. I noticed your best dress is — is not becoming to you and to-morrow I want you to go to the store with me and a dressmaker and see what I can do for you. They tell me also you go to early mass with Norah. I hope it can be arranged so you can attend the Protestant Church with me while we remain here."

And that night poor Myrtle was so much happier that she could scarce go to sleep. One thing only troubled her, her use of an assumed name, but to admit that and her own, meant to betray Mark's connection with her running away and break her promise as well, and she could not do that.

From this time on, however, life at Conway Hollow became an easier and brighter one for Myrtle. The manifest interest and friendship of the wealthy and aristocratic Mrs. Davis for her, had an occult influence on Landlord Barker and his angular spouse, it was easily arranged for Myrtle to attend church Sunday mornings, the dining-room service was also changed so that she could serve her patroness and the regular boarders instead of the transient ones, and the shrewd, tip-inspiring Norah, was relegated to the drummers' tables and a chance to garner their dimes and quarters. And now occurred an amusing incident, for when he of the red necktie and loud raiment again appeared, Norah was ready for him. His first move was to lay a half-dollar beside his plate as Norah came to take his order which she at once transferred to her apron pocket.

"I vants you to meet me outside disevenin'," he then whispered, "und pring dot odder girl, te one mit de pig eyes. I vill meets you at de post office ven you say und puy you candy und ice-cream. Then I vants you to go back und leave me to take a valk mit de odder girl, I vants to talk mit her alone und I give you two dollars if you fix it. Vill you?"

"Shure," returned Norah on the instant in a quick whisper, "and she will do just as I say," and then she listened to his order and went to fetch it.

"It's all right," she whispered again on her return, "shure we'll mate ye there jist after eight, but I want the two dollars now."

And she got them.

He kept the appointment as a matter of course, and it took almost an hour of watchful waiting before it dawned on him he had been duped. Then he said things totally unfit for publication.

To add to his chagrin, Katie came to serve him the next morning and he had sense enough to see that a complaint to her would be worse than ridiculous, so he made none and went his way a little wiser and somewhat sadder.

But Myrtle unknowingly shared in his well-deserved fine, for the next morning she was invited to

Norah's room where the three girls ate their fill of candy.

But the summer had now passed at Conway Hollow and the last of September had come. Frosts had nipped the Barker House garden and wilted the flower beds in front. The hill-sides all around were a blaze of scarlet and gold, the crippled girl could no longer sit in the gorge and paint, most of the summer boarders had already departed and Mrs. Davis was also preparing to journey southward. She and her daughter had now almost become mother and sister to Myrtle and for scarcely an evening were they apart. And then came a climax to this tender relation.

"We are going away to-morrow," Mrs. Davis said to Myrtle that evening, "and now, Iva, I have a proposal to make you. We need a good, strong, intelligent and willing girl to be a companion for Virginia. To walk or ride with her, to help her dress and be a lady's maid for her. My home is closed now, we shall board somewhere until my husband returns from abroad in October, and then I wish to engage you to come to us. I will pay you fifty dollars a month and give you a pleasant home. Will you come?"

It is needless to say that the offer was accepted on the instant for by this time Myrtle would have walked to the ends of the earth to serve this gracious lady and kindly friend.

"I think you offer me too much, however," she asserted after a moment's thought. "Five dollars a week, my pay here, is enough and all I ought to get. I would rather you made it that."

"I feel what I wish to pay is little enough," Mrs. Davis smiled in answer, "you will need to be dressed in accordance with your station, so I shall insist on my proposal. I shall also advance you a month's salary before we go, leave you full directions to follow when I write you, trains you must take, etc. I would have you go with us now but you should give Mr. Barker reasonable notice and then, we may visit friends for the next two weeks."

Little did Mrs. Davis, well used to travel, realize how this almost a thousand-mile journey alone now appalled poor Myrtle. But she would not complain or say a word. A home and future had been offered her, a bountiful blessing, almost, and not by one word would she hint her fears.

One matter only now oppressed her and that was Mark and the money she owed him. She had it all saved now, one hundred dollars in large bills safely hid in her bed, and in her heart the faint hope still that he would yet find her. She wasn't so far from Folly Island after all! A day's journey would bring her to it and why mightn't he possibly search for her and find her here?

But to go so far away meant to sever the last chance for him to find her.

And that night she conquered her maidenly pride, wrote him a dignified missive recounting her escape from Folly Island how long she was to remain here and her future plans. Then she — knowing no other direction — addressed the letter to his city only.

But it never reached him, for a shift in post office clerks had occurred, Mark growing hopeless of ever hearing from her he had omitted to notify the new clerk, and Myrtle's missive finally landed where all unclaimed ones go.

CHAPTER XXIV

INTO A GREAT CITY

The sun seemed to grow dim and hope to vanish as Myrtle watched her two new friends enter the stage and depart from Conway Hollow. They had participated in a tender parting that morning — tearful on the part of Myrtle — and then when the stage vanished around a bend she resumed her daily duties.

"Shure ye ought to be smilin', me darlin', so ye had," Norah asserted, glancing at Myrtle's eyes, "an' not be sp'ilin' yer beauty wid wapin'. Haven't ye made friends wid a rich leddy, got a foine new dress an' ain't ye goin' where ye'll have a chance to be almost a leddy yerself? I think you're in luck, so I do."

But the luck, or Myrtle's hopes of it soon seemed to follow the brown leaves now falling so rapidly from the maples in front of the Barker House, for one week, then two passed, and no letter from Mrs. Davis, and — worst cloud of all — none from Mark. And then Myrtle began to reproach herself for not writing to him sooner. Also, and in the light of more experience in the world's ways, how foolish, almost childish, she had been. And now another and more mature idea came to her. Why not go to his city or stop off there on her way south when Mrs. Davis sent for her and hunt him up? He could surely be found, she had the best kind of an excuse, to pay back the money he had said was a loan, and then he had assured her he was and wished to be her friend and protector. She would not now feel any indelicacy in so doing, she was not going to him for more help, she had almost fifty dollars of her own money, a new dress she was quite proud in, a good situation awaiting her, she could go to some small hotel, hire a room and next day find his address and call at his office. It all seemed so much easier now, Folly Island's timidity and inexperience were leaving her, and the great world seemed a less imposing realm. The more she thought the plan over, the more firmly she decided to follow it. Then she began to wonder if he had received her letter, and now knowing how big a city his was, to believe it certainly had not reached him. Going to that metropolis did not now awe her so much, either. By stage to railroad and train it took just a day to reach it, Norah had made the journey three times already, (she came from a smaller city near it), was going home now in about three weeks, and so the two began to discuss plans together and alternate hopes and fears to assail Myrtle. Her own plans also now hinged upon the expected summons from Mrs. Davis and day after day she watched and waited for it. She had given her present employer due notice of her intent to leave, two table girls were all the Barker House needed from November to May and while Landlord Barker would have much preferred to keep Myrtle for one, now that she was assured of a better home he was glad for her sake. And then after four weeks' waiting Myrtle received her expected letter from Mrs. Davis. It was more than cordial, it was even tender, and yet a sad blow for it informed her that Mrs. Davis had changed her plans entirely.

"We are going to take poor Virginia to Colorado," she wrote, "and try the efficacy of mineral baths. We shall spend the winter there, return home in the spring, and then I shall want you to join us for good. In the meantime please remain where you are. I shall write you from Colorado and expect you to answer soon and tell me all about yourself."

And then Myrtle sat down and shed copious tears.

Somehow it now dawned upon her also that her new lady's maid position was like to fail her eventually, but that was less a trouble than to lose a kindly friend. Norah was now her sole refuge and to her she went.

"Don't ye moind, darlin'; don't ye moind," that optimistic girl assured her, "shure ye're fifty dollars better off than iver and whin I lave for home we'll go together. I live in Auburn, as I didn't tell ye, it's not far from the big city where ye're sure o' findin' a place in a sthore. That's more ladylike an' fitted to ye onaway."

Thus it came to pass a week later that Myrtle with her belongings in a new cheap trunk and Norah Cassidy, with hers in an old rope-bound one, bade good-bye to Conway Hollow and started cityward. And many a tender assurance of future devotion was exchanged between these two during that twelve-hour journey, and many a worldly wise bit of cautioning advice fell from Norah's lips as well.

"Wid your good looks, me darlin'," she said when they were nearing their journey's end, "ye kin git a place aisy in a big sthore. They won't pay ye more than five dollars to start wid but if ye be smilin' an' ketch on ye kin git six and siven soon. Ye must find yerself a chape room to start wid, don't pay over two-fifty an' males'l be two siventy-five and thin thar's yer washin'. It won't lave ye a cint to begin, moind that, but ye'll wurrk up. Thar's another thing," she added more confidentially, "an' that is fellys. Don't thrust 'em a minnit. They'll flatther ye till yer head is shwelled, want ye to go out aitin' wid 'em, then to shows, more aitin' an' wine wid that. I know 'em, but don't ye do it, darlin', don't ye do it, they're all alike an' mane bad by ye."

When the rocking, rushing train had sped on until darkness began to hide the landscape it then slowed down, a brakeman thrust his head into their car door, yelled "Obun, Obun, next stop Obun," and the moment for parting had come.

"Come out to see me Sunday inny toime thar do be trains," Norah then said rising, "its Thirty-siven River Sthrate I live, an' ye're welcome. Kape a stiff upper lip too, my darlin', an' if ye git stuck ax a policeman," and with this final caution the two embraced, kissed, kissed again, and Norah, the honest, big-hearted, keen-witted Irish maid, joined the outgoing passengers.

Once before Myrtle had looked out of a car window to catch the last view of a friendly face through mist-filled eyes, now tears came while she watched for Norah's and failed to see it.

Another half-hour of the roaring on-rush while twinkling lights sped by the window, then a halt, a start and the train rolled slowly into a monstrous covered station, and, hand-bag in hand, Myrtle became a lonely, lonesome, trembling unit among the stream of arriving humanity. It was also her lot to be bumped against, jostled, crowded in the rush of people who at such a moment forget every civility of life in a mad effort to act solely for self. Once outside the station she was confronted by a narrow street packed full of moving vans, wagons, hacks, and trolley cars. Just across an electric sign blinked the letters "Fox Ale" with half-minute interims; to the left another of those, a fiery serpent (typical emblem) darted around the blazing words "Hunter's Whiskey"; while to the right, below, and from every vantage point, some other winking, blinking alternating sign was flashing. A rumbling roar of sound stunned her senses, she felt she had stepped into a glaring, shouting bedlam; an inferno of sound and mad humanity. Four months previous she would have fainted from fright; now she stood trembling in abject fear. Then a rush of outcoming people almost crowded her off the sidewalk, one man bumped against her, another swore at her, and then, just as she was about to scream from fright she saw a burly, blue-coated policeman two rods away, and Norah's words came to her.

"Oh, mister man," she said, pushing up to him, "won't you please help me. I want to go to some hotel."

"Shure, leddy," he answered gallantly smiling into her scared face, "come wid me, I'll show ye," and never before was Myrtle so glad to again hear Norah's Irish brogue. And be it said, ever afterwards that Celtic pronunciation always sounded like music to her.

Then he seized her by the arm, almost dragged her through the crowd to a crossing, waved his baton to team-drivers and once across the street halted.

"What hotel do yez want, leddy," he then asked, "a high-priced wan or jist ony wan?"

"I want a safe one," she answered still trembling, "where I can get a room."

Whether it was her voice, her eyes, or look of abject fear that now won his heart on the instant will never be known, but something did for he again grasped her arm and led her on up the street, then to left, to right and into a ten-story hostelry.

"This leddy wants a room," he then half demanded striding up to the marble counter as if he owned the earth. "She's a sthranger here, she is, so trate her right," and with a toss of his head as if that settled it, he turned and left her.

"A two, two-fifty or three dollar one," queried the clerk, his voice shading from grandiloquence to polite inquiry as he whirled the register around and handed her a pen.

"A two-dollar one, please," she answered and then managed to write "Iva Stone" in trembling hand on the register.

"Two dollars, please," he echoed in more mellifluous tone and then Myrtle stared at him not understanding.

"Two dollars and pay now," he added and then she grasped the situation, opened her bag and paid. A bell was banged, an ebon-faced boy made a grab for her bag but failed to get it, she followed him to an elevator, was shot up nine stories, shown to a twelve-by-eight room and left alone.

And now for the first time since she parted from Norah did poor scared Myrtle feel that she was safe for the moment.

But it took a good half-hour before she got over trembling.

Then she began to realize that she was hungry. But to go down and out of that monster building now and into the horrible bedlam again alone, she dared not, even if starving, and so a prisoner, almost, she remained in her cell. Neither did she feel like sleep now though faint and weary, for the roar and rumble of the great city reached even up to her top-floor and one-window den, and so she sat down and looked out upon it.

And what a vast expanse of twinkling lights and new wonder-world it now seemed! From Sandy Bay to Conway Hollow had been surprising, the towns she caught glimpses of from the rushing train had awed her from their increased size, now she was almost numb from utter astonishment at the miles of blinking lights and all-sized buildings surrounding her. And in the morning when she started out to obey Norah's first order and find a room, this vastness assailed her even more. Which way to go or which way she did go she had no idea. She merely followed one street and then another until gradually the buildings became less imposing and she saw signs of "Room to let" in windows. And even these abodes now seemed too grand for her to seek shelter in and not until hours of wandering brought her to ordinary two- and three-story brick houses did she dare apply at one. A shock awaited her at the first for a hard-faced woman met her at the door and a curt "We do not let rooms to girls" with a closing of it the next moment was all the answer she got. Two more on that street seemed run on the same "men only" basis and going onto another one and trying again Myrtle met a curious experience. A portly negress met her at the door and in response to her timid inquiry for a room said "Why ob cose you kin git one here, honey, come in an' see de missus." Myrtle was then ushered into a gorgeously furnished parlor, a middle-aged woman with unduly red lips, white complexion, yellow hair, many wrinkles, and garbed in a blue wrapper soon entered and Myrtle rose to meet her.

"You want a room I understand," she said smiling at Myrtle with sinister eyes. "I guess we can take care of you."

"I am so glad if I can find a room," Myrtle answered, "I've tried at five or six houses and they only let rooms to men."

"Well, I only take in girls," the woman responded sweetly, and watching her caller, "I can give you a room. Where are you from?"

"I came from — from Conway Hollow," Myrtle stammered, "I am going to find work in a store."

"I guess you can do that my dear," came the familiar answer, "girls with your shape are always in demand."

"How much are your rooms," Myrtle next queried surprised at this speech, "I cannot pay over two dollars and a half a week."

"Oh, 'most any price you wish to pay," the woman responded, "sit down and we will talk it over." Then she also seated herself near and touched a bell on a tiny onyx table. "Bring some sherry, Chloe," she next directed to the negress who answered the bell, "this lady is tired and needs a glass of wine.

And so you are from Conway Hollow, my dear," she continued again addressing Myrtle, "have you any friends in this city?"

"No," returned Myrtle wondering why this almost ghastly-faced lady took such a sudden interest in her, "I don't know anybody here. I came last night to look for work."

"Well then, I will help you to-morrow," the woman returned, again smiling at Myrtle, "so now take off your hat and make yourself at home. How would you like a position with me as house-maid," she added, "just waiting on company? I need a pretty girl like you and will pay good wages."

In an instant Myrtle recalled Mrs. Davis and then glanced around the luxuriously appointed room. "I — I might," she hazarded, "how much wages will you pay?"

"Oh, eight or ten dollars a week," the woman answered indifferently. "I am not particular as to that. Have a glass of wine," she added pouring one from the decanter the negress had now brought, "and tell me your name and all about yourself."

"I never drank wine in my life," Myrtle answered unconscious of the trap set for her, or that in that wine glass a tiny portion of white powder had been placed. "I thank you, but I must refuse it."

"As you wish, my dear," the woman responded sweetly, pouring another and drinking it, "and now what is your name?"

"Iva Stone," replied Myrtle directly.

"A very pretty name too," smiled the woman, "and quite romantic. Have you ever had a lover, my dear?"

"No, ma'am," Myrtle returned firmly and coloring, "I never have."

"Not a little one at school," the woman continued suavely, "just a nice boy who kissed you a few times?"

And then a curious thing happened for out from behind a portiere enclosing another room came a suppressed giggle and glancing that way Myrtle saw the edge of a girl's face quickly withdrawn and in an instant knew that she had been watched by some one.

"I guess I — I don't want to stay here," she stammered, rising and starting for the street door.

"Oh, yes you do," the woman returned firmly, also rising, "I want you."

But the now-scared girl was ahead of her, she reached the knob first, as luck would have it seized the right knob, opened the door and darted into the street.

And she never realized how narrow an escape she had had, or into what a den of infamy she had blundered.

CHAPTER XXV

COMMOTION AT CONWAY HOLLOW

A WEEK after Myrtle's departure John Barker happened into the post office one day and saw staring him in the face on its wall the following placard in bold type.

"*ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD*

"Will be paid for information of the whereabouts of a young girl named Iva Stone or Myrtle Baldwin formerly from Folly Island. Said young lady is of medium height, well-formed, has large dark eyes, and may be passing under another name. The above reward will be promptly paid to any one who first informs the subscriber of her present location.

"Address MARK MASON, Box ——."

"Wal, I swow," ejaculated Landlord Barker, "ef that ain't our purty table-gal I'm a goat! By crimus," he added gasping for breath, "I knew the minute I sot eyes on her thar was a coon in the haymow! An' she was purty, too, danged if I wa'n't in love with her myself in spite o' Abigail! Je-ru-se-lem but I must have that hundred dollars," and he tore the poster from the wall and started on a run for the hotel. He wrote part of his letter wondering if any one in the town had forestalled him; and then paused for all he could state — or had stated — was that she had been in his employ three months. Then letter in hand he sought Katie in the kitchen.

"Whar does Norah Cassidy live, 'n' whar did that Stone gal go to 'tother day," he demanded of her.

"Shure I don't know," Katie answered astonished. "Norah come from Auburn she towld me once, an' that's all I know."

"Was Miss Stone going thar or where," he next queried hurriedly. "I want to find whar she is at once."

"Begorra I can't tell ye thin, she was that close ye cud niver get a wurrd out of her. I belave that leddy, Mrs. Davis, wid the lame gal, hired her fer a leddy's maid, so I was towld be Norah."

It wasn't satisfactory but it was some information and John Barker now added it to his letter, addressed and posted it and then sought his particular crony, Bela Griggs, who kept the chief grocery store and market in Conway Hollow. By this time he had also cooled off a little and resolved, as he would say to "keep whist."

"Curis thing, Bela," he ejaculated entering the store, "'bout that gal I had this summer. She lit out a week ago 'n' I want to find whar she's gone 'n' can't. Naow I think my table gal Katie knows 'n' won't tell. Can't you git your team boy — he's kinder sweet on Katie,— can't you git him to pump Katie 'n' find if she knows whar she's gone? I'd give a fiver to find out."

"Wal, mebbe," drawled Bela, "what's in the wind?"

"I am," chuckled Barker, "'n' its blowin' purty smart, you just find out whar that Stone gal's gone somehow from Kate or anybody 'n' the fiver is yourn." Then having launched this search warrant he hastened out and to the post office again.

"Who brung that notice 'bout the reward for a gal," he next demanded of Colby Stoddard, P. M. and peering into the general delivery window, "the one offerin' a hundred dollars fer her?"

"Why it cum in the mail," Colby answered astonished, "cum 'bout four days ago 'n I stuck it up."

"And didn't read it?"

"Yas I read it," Colby rejoined staring at him, "why what's up? 'Twant 'bout nobody I knew or ever heard on."

"No, o' course not," returned Barker suavely, "'Taint nobody I know 'bout either. I jist read it and thought I'd ask that's all," and having satisfied himself that the secret was mainly his so far, he stalked out of the office.

But it wasn't his long for others had read the strange notice, Bela told the next customer (a woman), John Barker had "gone crazy he guessed" over one of his table girls, Iva Stone, this woman told a neighbor who happened to have read the poster and now recalled who Iva Stone was and before night all Conway Hollow knew that a reward was offered for her.

But the said poster was safe in John Barker's pocket — shrewd Yankee that he was — so the vital part of the matter was his as yet.

But Conway Hollow now experienced a sensation the like of which it had never known before, for this girl's beauty had been noticed and commented upon by one and all, the peculiar way he found her had been admitted by John Barker, her almost unique secretiveness also discussed and told by his boarders had spread over the town and now everybody there was agog over the choice bit of gossip.

And in just four days Mark Mason arrived post haste.

"Where is John Barker," he demanded of Mrs. Barker who happened to be in the office when he arrived, "I want to see him at once."

" He's out in the barn," she answered scared a little by Mark's peremptory manner, " I'll go 'n' fetch him," and with fear of sheriff's writs or similar troubles in mind she hurried out to inform her spouse.

" Thar's a man in the office wants ye quick, John," she asserted to him, " he near snapped my head off! What's up, hev ye ben gittin' into trouble?" she added anxiously.

But John didn't wait to explain and hastened to the office.

It is also small wonder that Mark was excited even to the verge of almost insolent speech, for this was the first direct news of the girl he was now madly in love with, received in almost four months. And it wasn't much when he got it from the astonished landlord, only an enlargement of his letter and recital of how he found and hired Iva Stone.

There were other people, too, in the office during the telling, a couple of traveling men and three boarders awaiting supper, Mrs. Barker of course, and Katie who having no one to serve, also peeped in. And somehow their hearts all went out to this bold, assertive young man who appeared not to care one whit if the whole town knew he was in love with this fair table girl! And yet they were wrong.

" I am more than disappointed you can't give me a clue to where she has gone," Mark declared after the meagre facts were related by Barker. "I've been hunting far and wide for this young lady, have advertised in fully fifty papers, and as a last resort, by the advice of a keen-witted woman, sent my notice of reward to over five hundred postoffices."

"Wal, ye scored inside the ring anyhow," answered Barker, sympathetically, "not a bull's eye but ye got a rise anyway. Now ye best go eat some supper 'n' arter that we'll git — wal I'll tell ye later," and Mark, feeling hope of success was a little brighter, betook himself to the dining room.

And Katie, who waited upon him, not only served him the best the house afforded in bountiful supply but watched him with admiring eyes while he ate it — and found a half-dollar under his plate later on. A romance to her "Kathleen Mavourneen" heart was like sunshine to a bed of spring violets.

Mark also during that silent meal bethought himself of the need of prudent speech and that everyone here would inevitably try to obtain from him all of Myrtle's past history — a sacred trust, he now felt. How much she had already disclosed he knew not, that would appear later, until then his lips must be sealed. And now returning to the office a surprise awaited him, quite typical of a country village for two dozen men and boys had already gathered there and more were coming in each moment! The news of his arrival and its reason had spread!

But John Barker was equal to the situation.

"We'll go up to my den — upstairs, Mr. Mason," he said in a master-of-ceremonies tone, "'n' talk this matter over kinder private like," and some of the crowd felt like scalping him.

"I s'posed, Mr. Mason," he continued when this retreat was entered and the door closed, "that you'd want to hear all 'bout this gal an' not have it a public lecture, ez it war."

"Most assuredly," returned Mark, thankful for his consideration, "for having to advertise this young lady so was galling enough, I assure you."

And then John Barker began his recital over again. How he first came to notice Myrtle on the train and where she carried her money; how scared she acted, how he came to accost her and its outcome, was all told in detail while Mark smoked and listened as only a lover will.

"She was the clusest gal I ever run across," John Barker continued, "I'm fair to middlin' on pumpin' folks but I jest couldn't git a word outen her only that she'd run away frum some'ers 'n' wanted a job. She was kinder keen too, held off sorter indifferent till I'd bid up my own figger a little. But she arned all she got 'n' more fer I never had a table-gal like her. Up arly 'n' hustlin' all the time, makin' the dinin' room look slicker 'n' a parlor with posies on the tables 'n' never a smile or word could the drummers git out'n her. I s'pose ye know what drummers is," he added, unconscious that Mark had been one many years, "allus makin' eyes at every purty table-gal an' tryin' to mash her? But they got left on Iva, Miss Stone I mean, she wouldn't even look at one on 'em. Thar was one, name o' Epstein, feller that sells laces 'n' sich fol-de-rols, wal, he got so daffy on her he give Norah, one o' the other gals then, two dollars to git her out to meet him, but it didn't work, not fer a minit. I s'pose, too, that gentleman from Jerusalem hain't got over mournin' fer them two plunks yit,— they're built that way."

"But where do you imagine she has gone?" interrupted Mark more anxious to solve this riddle than to hear gossip about drummers. "Didn't she tell anyone a word about her future plans?"

"Nary a peep, only one o' my boarders a Mrs. Davis from down South let on to my wife she'd engaged Iva, Miss Stone, I should say, to come 'n' be lady's maid for her arter she got through here. Was to give her fifty a month 'n' stiddy job."

"But you said you didn't know where she had gone," broke in Mark eagerly, "now, she must have gone to this woman's home; where was she from?"

"Oh, Wheelin', Virginny," asserted Barker on the instant, "only I don't think she did. Norah let on to Katie 'fore she left that that was all off. Norah was alus clus-mouthed too, an' she 'n' Iva was good friends. She, Norah I mean, got Iva to go to Catholic meetin', convarted her I s'pose, 'n' so o' course wouldn't tell on her."

"But who is Norah and where is she now?" queried Mark anxiously.

"Wal, she come from Auburn, I believe. I got her through an ad for table gals last spring."

"What's her other name?"

"Cassidy, Norah Cassidy."

"And this Norah never told anyone her plans either, that's curious. Didn't she tell this other girl of yours?"

"I cal'late not," drawled Barker, "or she'd a leaked it. She, Katie, ain't clus like Norah was, 'n' they wa'n't the best o' friends on that account. Katie was kinder jealous o' Norah 'cause she got the most tips outen the drummers a' they scrapped over my stable man."

"Can't we have a talk with this Katie," put in Mark anxious to obtain all the information possible at once. "Can't she come up here and let me talk to her?"

"Sartinly," responded Barker rising and Katie was summoned.

"Well, my good girl," began Mark pleasantly as soon as Katie was seated before the two men, "can you tell us, or have you any idea where Miss Stone went with Norah? Was she going to her home or to that of Mrs. Davis?"

"I don't be thinkin' she meant to go to ayther," Katie answered bluntly. "Shure Norah couldn't kape her an' the leddy, Mrs. Davis, put her off fer the prisint. Thar was some secret bechune these two, Norah an' Miss Stone, an' I warn't let into it onct."

"But you knew where this Norah lived in Auburn, her street and number, didn't you," queried Mark anxiously.

"No, I did'nt, sor," returned Katie in hurt tone, "jist Auburn, sor, that was all she iver towld me."

"An' thar ye be," added Barker meaning to be consoling, "up against two gals who had sense enough to keep their business to themselves."

"So I observe," returned Mark ruefully, "and all the worse for me. I can find this Norah Cassidy easy enough, I presume, only I want to save time.

"And now, my girl," he added again addressing Katie, "tell me where you think Miss Stone meant to go? What sort of employment she would naturally look for?"

"I think she wanted to be a leddy, sor," Katie answered candidly, "an' she was fitted for that in her ways, so nate a' wantin' flowers iverywhere. I think, sor, if ye'd pardon me, she was desavin' us whin she said it was all off wid Mrs. Davis. Norah said onct, an' all she iver towld me, that Miss Stone belaved some man was like to folly her here an' arrist her maybe. I think so too, sor, for she was always that scart."

"An' thar ye be agin," interrupted Barker, "I said at the start there was a nigger in the woodpile 'n' I think so still. You can go now, Katie," he added, glancing at Mark, "if Mr. Mason has no more questions to ask."

And as none were forthcoming Katie left the room more mystified than ever.

"And now," continued Barker, "if you was willin' to 'low how Miss Stone felt towards you, mebbe I kin make a guess whar she's gone?"

"Well," answered Mark slowly, realizing that he must now make a partial admission of his own feelings, "there are some very peculiar facts in connection with Miss Stone's past life — no reflection I mean — but facts I am not at liberty to disclose. I knew where she ran away from and why, I gave her the means to do so, and advised her to use the name Iva Stone, wrote her where to meet me and in that letter a proposal of marriage as well. It never reached her as I've learned, she ran away in a fit of desperation, she can't have learned I've advertised for her or she'd write me and so you see the complication. Also as you said that I am up against it. I am, and a brick wall at that."

"Norah's your only hope then," responded Barker consolingly, "or it's barely possible she may have written this Mrs. Davis 'bout her plans. I know she put Iva, Miss Stone, I mean, off somehow fer she had a cryin' spell arter the letter came. My idea is you'd best chase Norah an' not let any grass grow under your feet, either."

And so it now seemed to Mark.

Another touch of the trite truism that all the world loves a lover was disclosed the next morning when Mark paid his bill.

"I am going to give you fifty dollars toward the reward now, Mr. Barker," he said counting out the money, "and when I find Miss Stone I'll send you check for balance."

"I won't take a damn cent," John Barker answered bluntly, half hurt by the proposal, "you jest find your sweetheart, git hitched, come up here on your weddin' tower an' I'll make it pleasant fer ye, bet yer boots!"

And when Mark left Conway Hollow the key of his happiness seemed hidden in the city of Auburn.

But John Barker, whose vinegar-tempered spouse had nagged him for many years, now obtained some consolation and rubbed it into her as only he could.

"Wal, Abigail," he drawled slowly after the lumbering stage had started and stroking his chin-whiskers, "I s'pose ye've heered 'bout barkin' up the wrong tree 'n' bakin' 'fore your oven's hot, hain't ye?"

"I dunno what ye mean, John Barker," she snapped, conscious that she was about to receive what she would call "a hetcheling."

"Oh, yas ye do, yas ye do," John returned, his eyes twinkling, "when that poor gal landed here ye treated her wuss'n a cur dog ye did, 'n' wouldn't even see she was fed that night! Thar hain't ben a mean thing ye cud say 'bout her ye ain't sed 'n' more'n that hev mistrusted me, an' old fossil she wouldn't need to look at twice! Then agin, all through her bein' here you've used her nasty out o' cussed, narrer jealousy, 'n' air to blame fer our losin' the best table gal we ever had. 'N' thar ain't one o' the boarders but what's sayin' it 'n' sneerin' at ye, 'n' it's all over town ez well! What you orter do is send that temper 'n' mind o' yourn to the laundry 'n' hev 'em washed 'n' ironed. Ef you had the runnin' o' this house for a year I'd go broke."

" But she was a sly, deceivin', little hussy," snarled Abigail, " 'n' I never would trust her. I believed she was a bad un an' do now, the sneaky moon-eyed Jez —"

" Say, Abigail, you jest quit callin' her names right now," interrupted John sharply, " I've heered viper-tongued wimmen talk a durn sight wuss 'n you kin, 'cause they was a durn sight smarter! When you git at it you don't 'pear to know 'nuff to cuddle sap in an old boot, you don't! Ef Mrs. Davis was here she cud tell you a few things, too, she cud, fer she was a woman o' sense that's forgot more'n you ever knew," and John stalked out of the office to end the quarrel.

CHAPTER XXVI

ATHENS

The half million or less population comprising modern Athens were deporting and disporting themselves in about the usual way of humanity that November afternoon when poor scared Myrtle, realizing that she had escaped from some den of iniquity, once more started on her quest for a room.

On Paragon Hill and Quality Avenue the aristocratic cult, the bluebloods, were working hard to amuse themselves, striving to outshine and outdo one another after the manner of all self-satisfied "Blues." The rich mammas were scheming and conniving to aid their daughters in landing eligible and especially wealthy husbands; to that end and purpose they garbed their maiden offspring as never Solomon was arrayed; gave receptions, cotillions, affairs, and crushes without stint; and discussed who should be invited and who not, as if the fate of a nation hinged on that momentous subject. They also criticised one another, sneered at each other in the suave, smooth, cynical manner peculiar to all aristocracy — codfish or otherwise — and the bumptious, arrogant "I am it" percolated through every speech, and every assertion. The "common herd" were referred to as if out of the pale of God's blessings or mercy. The newly rich were raked over the coals of sarcasm behind their backs yet flattered nauseatingly to their faces while their wines were drank and viands eaten. As of old, these bluebloods worshipped at one and the same shrine, only it was the gold of the calf they bowed down to now and even the calf had grown conscious of the change. There was culture also in this aristocratic community whose trade mark was the dollar sign, and great artists were fêted, famous singers banqueted, and deep thinkers patronized and made social lions.

There was Anglomania, and scions of effete nobility without a spoonful of brains in their backward-sloping craniums or a drop of honest blood, were toadied to and sought after in disgusting manner. Now and then one of Aristocracy's — and money's — fair daughters sold herself to a nobility's impecunious son as basely as ever a scarlet woman sold herself — and sought the divorce courts later.

There were clubs in this cult; Browning clubs, Ibsen clubs, Emerson clubs, where women gathered to read and gravely discuss these famous writers in a bumptious, critical manner, although to most of them the utterances of these authors were as unintelligible as the hieroglyphics upon an Egyptian obelisk.

There were golf, tennis, and riding clubs in this clan, whose ostensible object was out-door and health-giving sport, and real one; a chance for Society to show its raiment and permit match-making to go on.

There were churches within the sacred precincts of this cult, temples of mammon where fashion with a capital F was ever on parade and religion an excuse for it. Where Wealth held a weekly mutual-criticism meeting with reclining in luxurious pews, listening to much classic music, and little sermonizing. A few ministers also found occupation amid this gilded coterie; one or two worthy workers in this gospel vineyard who honestly strove to lift their congregation out of indolence, self-love and vanity, and waken their souls to broader and better thoughts; and more whose sole ambition was to marry, christen, and eulogize their flocks on call; also assure them that they had made their calling and election sure, spread the unction of spiritual flattery over their consciences, ignore their failings, and draw a fat salary for so doing. This was the highly cultured, blueblooded, gilt-edged cult of Modern Athens, satisfied with themselves, sneering at all humanity outside their pale, and with a "Behold my Majesty" in some heraldic form on their various coats of arms.

There was also a middle class in this " busy, better and more bumptious " city, a few thousand stock gamblers who fleeced one another for practice and the outside public for profit; half as many doctors who dispensed pills, paregoric and plausible promises at so much per; lawyers who juggled laws for their own ends, fomented strife to obtain fat fees, and rescued estates from litigants to keep them themselves; and more thousands of busy business men pursuing the elusive dollar, week in, week out.

There was also a nether world in this great city. A world chained down by vice and poverty, yet dwelling within the same confines; where the scarlet army flaunted its sin-bought plumes and finery in the faces of honest workers and rode in carriages while they walked. Where tithe was paid for law's protection and obtained, and where thousands lived in the most abject wretchedness without even sanitation or decency. Here entire families often made their abode in one small room, children learned the ways of sin before they did their letters, illegitimacy was no social ban, theft an evidence of ability, and the name of God seldom heard except in blasphemy. Here also or around the borders of Slumdom, dwelt thousands of salesgirls in stores and all classes of working girls, expected to dress well and live honestly on four, five, and six dollars a week; and if they failed in so doing, no sane person wondered at it. Here, as might be expected, saloons by the hundred flourished like so many upas trees and open alike to both sexes. The rum shop stood next to the brothel, the gambling house flanked that, and the gaunt spectres of vice, debauchery, and poverty, ever trailed their scarlet or black robes over or fastened their merciless fangs upon this hope-forsaken world. Into this the aristocracy never penetrated. If they, as most of them did, owned these scores of vice-infected, unsanitary abodes, an agent collected the rent, and if that was not forthcoming, ousted tenants with no more compunction than if they were as many swine. A few zealots in the guise of a Salvation Army ever strove to leaven this nether world by hackneyed phrase and discordant sound and gathered alms to feed the countless children forced into existence. A few philanthropists talked much about what should be done for this under-world and did but little. Now and then a slumming party inspired by curiosity rode through it at night and had their senses properly offended while so doing. Patrol wagons occasionally came to remove some rum-crazed sinner, hearses plied their grewsome errands with frequency, and so life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — or abject misery — continued here, year in, year out.

Those pursuits were also in full swing that November afternoon when poor, misguided, and unwise Myrtle Baldwin made her fortunate escape from a police-protected den of vice. And so scared was she that she never halted to even look for a "Room to let" sign until she had traversed several streets and entered a less pretentious section. Then she followed a narrow avenue sloping downward with still narrower side streets crossing it, each bearing a letter for designation, and when she came to "M" street halted, for its only occupants as far as she could see were a few children and two or three dogs. Its comparative quiet also allured her and turning into it she once more looked for a room sign. A half-dozen of "M" street's dingy brown, wooden buildings, were glanced at, then the name "Cassidy" caught her eye in a window with "Room to let," and "Washing done here," beneath it; Norah of course recurred to her at once in occult connection, and here she turned in and knocked at the door. A portly woman, bare-armed, red-faced, answered her summons.

"Shure I hev one room, ye kin see it," she responded to Myrtle's timid inquiry, and looking surprised that so well-dressed a girl should have blundered into her street. "It's two flights back" she added, leading the way upstairs, "an' two-fifty the wake widout hate." It wasn't a pretentious one either, two wooden chairs, a cane-seat rocker, washstand, tiny stove, faded carpet, and yellow turned-spindle bedstead, being its furnishings. It smelled musty also and its one window opened upon a back yard now aflutter with washing. But the price and the name of Cassidy combined determined Myrtle and she engaged it.

"It's pay a wake to begin wid, no offense, ma'am," asserted Mrs. Cassidy, "an' no fellys 'lowed in yer room, ma'am," and having thus stated price and terms she wondered how it happened that so handsome an American girl should accept so cheap and poor a room!

"An' what may be yer name?" she next queried bluntly, "an' whar ye from?"

"You may call me Miss Stone," responded Myrtle smiling at this outspoken Hibernian lady, "I came from Conway Hollow to find work in this city and"—with a shade of pathos, "your name caught my eyes because it's the same as that of my only girl friend."

"An' shure it's a famous one in the ould counthry," rejoined Mrs. Cassidy much pleased, "an' me man, Dinnis Cassidy, was kilt four years ago, God rist his sowl, wid a derrick, an' Tim he do be drivin' a tip-cart an' Mary Ann she's eighteen an' workin' in a box shop an' Agnes, she's bundle girl in a big sthore. I hov two more in the cimetery," she added, "and' wid washin' an' the wages an' lettin' a room we pay the rint."

"I have a trunk at the station I must get," Myrtle rejoined now feeling that this voluble Irishwoman must be honest, "and I shall have to find some place for meals I suppose."

"Shure thar do be a good aitin'-place four streets up," answered Mrs. Cassidy, with increased interest, "an' Tim kin fetch the trunk for a quarther an' glad to get it an' if ye loike ye kin have tay wid us."

And thus was Myrtle Baldwin, the erstwhile waif of Folly Island, duly installed in the great city of Athens and fortunate to have obtained shelter among honest and kind-hearted people. Her landlady was curious, however, as she soon found out, and now Myrtle, profiting by experience, decided to give a little more plausible account of herself and so check all suspicion.

"I am an orphan," she explained when the two had descended to Mrs. Cassidy's one small "best room," "and left the place I had been living at last summer at work in a hotel. It was there I made friends with this Norah Cassidy, and by her advice came here to find a place in some store." A partial fiction of course, but Myrtle had come to realize that she must so conceal her past or else awaken suspicion.

"An' shure ye can aisy, wid your face," responded Mrs. Cassidy admiringly. "An' Agnes kin take ye to her sthore in the mornin'. It's the bist in the city, shure it is, an' they do be wantin' foine girls to tind the counthers."

That evening also served more firmly to establish Myrtle in her new home for she — to check questions regarding her previous life — enlarged upon and described her experiences at Conway Hollow, also Norah; while Mary Ann and Agnes, both keen-witted girls, opened her eyes a little regarding city life. Myrtle, who by this time had learned the wisdom of judicious flattery, also won their good will by a few words of it, and they became her admirers at once.

Her admission into "The Emporium," the largest department store in Athens, the next morning was also an easy matter for Agnes piloted her to the elevator, she was shot up eight stories, presented herself at the "Help Engaged" office and there found a small, thin, gray-haired man seated at a desk and writing.

"I was sent here by Agnes Cassidy, sir," Myrtle interrupted him with, and then he looked up and turned to her with a snap.

"Who's Agnes Cassidy?" he demanded, flashing one sharp look at her.

"Why, she works here," Myrtle answered in surprise, "and I want a place, too, if I can get it."

"Ever work in a store before?" he next demanded, resolving that he could use this handsome black-eyed girl on the instant.

"No, sir," she faltered, "I've only done table work in a hotel."

"Table work, eh?" he again queried now more interested, "are you quick at figures? Can you add and subtract correctly?"

"I — I guess so, sir," Myrtle rejoined, "I can try," and then he faced around for this wasn't the sort of girl who usually applied here for work.

"Well, you mustn't guess about that, have you any references?"

"I — I don't know what you mean, sir," she answered, scared a little by his abrupt manner. "I only came here yesterday."

"From where?" he next asked in a kindlier tone.

"I was working in a hotel at Conway Hollow, sir," she answered, hoping he would not insist on further disclosures.

Neither did he, for this keen business man whose fiat engaged or discharged over a thousand employees, only saw her as a neat, well-formed, quite handsome prospective one, who could most likely learn easily, and certainly would look well behind a counter. A cold, critical, comprehensive analysis as devoid of sentiment and much the same as the selection of a well-formed horse. Ten minutes of this sufficed, also, then he asked her name and city address, entered them in a small ledger, wrote "Set this girl at work," on a slip of paper and handed it to her.

"Go to Parsons, hosiery department," he then directed, "it's four-fifty for first two weeks, five after if you do well and aprons furnished," and then she was dismissed as if her own acquiescence in this bargain was a foregone conclusion.

It was, also, for poor Myrtle, utterly unused to city ways and bargain-making, and scared withal, dared not raise a question, but presented herself to Parsons (after many timid inquiries as to where he was in this monster hive) and found herself stared at by him. Neither did she like this young fellow's half-patronizing, half-insolent way of addressing her, or the bold and sinister look in his eyes.

"You are to come in at eight, Miss Stone," he directed after a glance at the slip of paper she handed him, "register in the girls' dressing room and be on duty at eight-thirty sharp. I will look after you," he added with covert smile and admiring glance, "and I am sure our department will be the gainer by your addition."

And of the two men so far met in this "Emporium of Fashion" (as advertised) Myrtle liked the small, keen-eyed, blunt-spoken, gray-haired man the better.

CHAPTER XXVII

A VANISHINC HOPE

When Mark left Conway Hollow he felt almost sure his four months of heart-hunger and sweetheart-hunting were soon to be rewarded and Myrtle found. All that now seemed necessary was to find his Norah Cassidy in Auburn and the rest would follow. So sure was he that within forty-eight hours this runaway girl would be located that he even wired Mrs. Upson the good news when the train halted for dinner, and when Auburn was reached late in the afternoon he hurried to a hotel and seized a directory before registering. There were Cassidys in it, nearly two pages of them, with almost every given name ever heard on Erin's green isle for Auburn was a mill city of eighty thousand or more and strongly Celtic. And now the needle and haymow simile occurred to Mark with pertinent force. There was no help for it, however; find Norah Cassidy he must, and to aid his quest he at once copied the street address of every Cassidy in the list before supper. Then he repaired to his room, washed, ate supper, and started out. His first call at the home of a Cassidy disclosed the fact that another family of that name not far distant had a daughter Norah and to this abode he now hurried with warm hopes.

"I want to see Miss Norah Cassidy," he asserted to the man who answered his knock.

"An' shure ye kin, come in, sor," was the cordial answer, and Mark was shown into John Cassidy's best room and Norah summoned.

"Were you doing table-work at Conway Hollow last summer," he hastily asked of this dignified Irish lass.

"No, sir," she answered in offended tone and excellent English, "I never heard of that place nor have done table-work, sir."

"Well excuse me, please," Mark rejoined meekly, "I was informed a lady of your name was there, and I wish to find her for especially urgent reasons. Do you happen to know of a namesake of yours who was there the past summer?"

"I do not, sir," she answered stiffly and looking as if she thought her caller was insane. "I know a Norah Cassidy but neither is she obliged to do table-work, sir," and then Mark, conscious he had offended this rather haughty young lady excused himself as best he could.

The next two Cassidy homes gave no better results, no Norah was a part of either family, but at the fourth he was told that a Norah Cassidy lived in another part of the city who had been waitress in some hotel. To this abode, street, and number as per his schedule Mark now turned his steps, found it a good mile away and in one of a row of mill tenements all alike. The "Norah" of this home — a red-haired and more distinctly Hibernian maid — had never heard of Conway Hollow or anybody else by the name of Norah. There were more Cassidys, however, in that vicinity, three families of them, and to those in due order Mark now appealed. At the house of the first a vicious dog showed unmistakable enmity but no Norah was forthcoming, the next seemed populated by at least a dozen children and two babies both yelling lustily, (none by the name of Norah however), and at the third a wake was in progress. At neither of these was any trace or tidings of a Norah obtained and then Mark took counsel with himself. Clearly the search for Miss Norah Cassidy so far was a dubious proceeding, and it was ten-thirty. Once more he consulted his list by the nearest street lamp and finding another Cassidy near he resolved to try one more call that evening. This also proved futile, no Norah dwelt there, but he obtained a little hope however and information that a Norah, in fact two of them, lived in another part of the city, and one had worked in a hotel some time previous. Here also it now occurred to Mark to check off the Cassidys he had so far called on so that on the morrow he could go about his search in a more coherent, logical manner. Then he returned to his hotel conscious that the finding of the right Norah in this city was not so easy a matter as it first seemed. He also, and still sure of success, wrote Mrs. Upson that night detailing his rather droll experiences, assuring her that she might expect a telegram next day and to come to his office as soon as she did.

He was up bright and early next morning, obtained a map of the city, located and checked as nearly as possible, all Cassidys not yet called on and after breakfast again started out on his curious quest. The two who had Norahs in the house were first sought but without benefit, the next directed him to one he had called on the evening previous and when he, not recognizing the house, tried there, the door was promptly shut in his face with a "go wan, ye loonatic, or I'll have ye 'risted," from the woman who came to the door.

By this time, Mark had began to grow discouraged. He had tramped Auburn for eight hours, called on at least twenty Cassidys, found eight Norahs, none the right one, been chased by dogs, taken for a maniac three times, and disturbed a wake. All in all, so far, it was depressing, and this clue to his much-wanted sweetheart seemed worse than elusive. Two dozen more Cassidys remained on his list, however, he had no intention of giving up the pursuit, only the vexatious similarity of race-names was exasperating and no progress had so far been made. He now consulted his list once more and began again. All the rest of the forenoon he hunted for Cassidys, crossing and recrossing his steps many times. Twice now he called at Cassidy homes previously visited but not checked and to meet scant courtesy. Noon came and a halt for dinner, then out again on the hunt once more. He tramped miles up and down narrow steets, found "Norahs young and Norahs old, Norahs warm and Norahs cold, Norahs tender and Norahs tough," but never the Norah he wanted or one that had ever heard of Conway Hollow! Finally and late in the afternoon having hunted down the last Cassidy home and grown weary, he sought his room and sat down to round up his experiences and decide what to do. Then it dawned on him that his informant of the Barker House might have been deceived by this Norah for reasons of her own and that Auburn wasn't her residence at all! Also and following this was the conclusion that he had spent at least twelve hours in a wild-goose chase. But what to do next, was the question. Myrtle had undoubtedly left Conway Hollow with this Norah, they had become good friends, most likely had exchanged confidences and mutual plans, to find Norah was to find Myrtle, but the Norah wasn't in Auburn! And then once more realizing that a woman's wits had been keener than his in this quest — as they had — Mark wrote to Mrs. Upson again. "Come at once to my office, Forty-two Bank Street," he said, "also wire me when you will arrive. I have hunted this city all over for Norah Cassidy and can't find her. Don't believe she lives here, and want to confer with you as to our next move. You must also accept the hospitality of my boarding-place 'The Elms' as my guest while in Athens."

Then he paid his bill and left Auburn.

But he was quite mistaken as many a man has been before, for Norah Cassidy was in Auburn and safely ensconsed in the home of her married sister, Mrs. Maggie O'Connor, whose frugal husband was prospering in the grocery business. More than that, and so near to the margin line of good or ill luck do we often step and fail to cross it; that Mark had even entered John O'Connor's store to inquire for and locate a Cassidy residence, had called at one only two doors away from where Norah was to state his errand, and not until he had departed did it dawn on this Mrs. Cassidy that her neighbor's sister might be the much-wanted Norah. Then she hastened to her and related the incident.

"An' shure he was 'most out of his sinses wid huntin' fer ye, Norah," she asserted in conclusion. "He said he'd been trampin' all day to find ye. An' he was a handsome jintleman, too," she added regretfully as if that made matters worse, "an' polite as by your lave, so he was."

And then Norah was so mystified that she gasped for breath for Myrtle, true to her promise to Mark, had never hinted that she knew such a person or any young man in fact, and so his original and well-meant caution, now recoiled upon him.

"I can't think what that man wanted of me," Norah asserted after recovering from her astonishment, "shure I harmed no one at Conway Hollow or sthole anything. Did he look loike a dhrummer," she queried after a pause, and recalling one especially who had tipped her liberally and declared he was smitten by her, "an' did he have sassy black eyes, an' curled-up moustache?"

"I niver cud tell how he looked," Mrs. Cassidy responded, "for I was that flustered. He was nice-lookin' I'm shure, an' soft-spoken loike a jintleman an' crazy to find ye, but comin' so suddin on me I fergot ye till he'd gone."

For an hour these two discussed Mark's mysterious quest in all its bearings, Mrs. O'Connor sure he must be a "dhrummer stuck on Norah," while Norah inclining to that opinion, as she had reason to, grew angry at his impertinence in so pursuing her.

"I wished I'd seen him," she said finally with a snap. "Shure I'd 'a' towld him what I thought o' the loikes o' him a trapesin after me jist bekase I tuk his tips an' smoiled at him, the impident gossoon," and then her keen wits came to the rescue.

"It wa'n't me he wanted at all at all," she asserted after a pause. "It was Miss Stone an' I know it! She was a table gal wid Mister Barker, too, an' a swate one wid a secret an' it was her felly huntin' fer me to find her," and then inspired by this sudden discovery of a romance she jumped up and down while her eyes sparkled.

"Shure I knew she was love-sick the furst mornin' I tuk her to mass," Norah added gleefully, "the way she bint her head and sighed. An' her eyes got wet wid tears, the poor darlin', but she niver towld. An' that's what made me love her," she continued, also sighing. "She was not loike most girls tellin' all about their fellys loike fools, not a bit of it! Miss Stone kept it to herself all the time, loike it was the name o' God, so she did," and then perforce Norah was called upon to recount more of her experiences at Conway Hollow and what she knew of Miss Stone.

"An' she's comin' to see me some Sunday," she asserted in conclusion, "an' I hope 'twill be soon so I kin tell her her felly's lookin' fer her the poor darlin', an' aise her heart."

But Myrtle never came to visit this bright and lovable Irish lass and so one more door to her rescue was closed.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A CONFERENCE OF WAYS AND MEANS

A SOMEWHAT pathetic meeting occurred between Mark and Mrs. Upson when they met at the station in Athens two days later, although a comparatively silent one, for only polite commonplaces were exchanged until the seclusion of his office was reached.

"Well, my dear mother," he then said half smiling, "it's been a case of almost certain hope then keen disappointment for the past five days, and while I know Myrtle is alive, or was two weeks ago, she is as much lost as ever," and then he recounted his visit to Conway Hollow, all he learned there and all about his unavailing search for this Norah Cassidy.

"Myrtle has gone somewhere," he concluded sadly, "but God only knows where. It may be to this city in search of a position in some store, to a mill town with this Norah and a chance for work there, or to the home of this southern lady, Mrs. Davis. The one fact that baffles me most is that Myrtle never made a confidante of any one — unless it be this Norah — at Conway Hollow, not even to the extent of admitting she came from Folly Island. It looks as if she believed she might be followed by your father and must keep herself absolutely hidden. Of course I told her to use the name Iva Stone, as I explained to you, and to beware of men's flatteries. Also that my connection with her running away and money assistance must be kept secret. She seems to have done even more, for no one at the Barker House learned even a hint of her past history or future intention after leaving there."

And then Mrs. Upson, whose eyes had never once left Mark's face during the recital, sighed deeply.

"I am worse than disappointed," she declared, "I am almost heart-broken. Your first letter and telegram gave me so much hope, your next letter even more, and now it's all gone. There is another confession I must make to you, Mr. Mason," she added again sighing, and covering her face, "and that is my own awakened sense of guilt. Before I met you that day my conscience was blunted as it were and my child seemed only an outcome and part of my betrayal by that villain. It is a burden I must forget to obtain peace of mind. To learn that she was alive, a grown-up girl and looking like me, only served to torture me, God only knows how much! It has been one long month of misery, of self-reproach and self-hatred to me. Oh, you cannot know, Mr. Mason," she added vehemently, "you cannot know how I have been punished for my sin and the end is not yet! Every day, every hour, every waking moment since I left you has been one of anguish! I have wept bitter tears of repentance. Prayed God to forgive me in vain, and seen my baby's face, as I last saw it, hovering over me in my dreams! Has it been a month or a year, Mr. Mason?" she continued looking up at him! "I cannot tell. And what makes it worse I have no one I dare confide in. Truly, as God has said, the way of the transgressor is hard and there is no hell that can be equal to the torture of one's conscience."

"Oh, come cheer up, my dear Mrs. Upson,—mother, I meant," Mark asserted buoyantly, for he was that way when others were in trouble. "We are going to find Myrtle, never fear, and then we'll all be happy. Forget the past right now and let us take a fresh start. And now I want your keen woman's wit to help me find my sweetheart. What do you say to your going to Conway Hollow to-morrow and using your tact and diplomacy to extract information from this table girl, Katie? My idea is she knows more than she told me and for reasons of her own, but what they are I cannot guess. This Norah is a strict Catholic, I learned, Katie wasn't, or not very. There was jealousy or a feud between them over some fellow, and there you are. I was so much in a hurry to get away and find this Norah I had only one short interview with Katie and she — scared I imagine — disclosed as little as possible."

"Of course I'll go there gladly," admitted Mrs. Upson brightening, "but — but —" shyly, "can't you get away and go with me? I have so much I want to talk over with you and I — I hate to be alone."

"I would do it cheerfully," Mark responded, "only I believe it would spoil your chance to learn much from this Katie. My being there would shut her up like a clam. I'll go to B—— with you," he added, after a pause to think the matter over, "then on to see my old friend, Hinckley, at Good Will Farm and meet you at B—— say two days later. Only I can't start until day after to-morrow on account of business I've neglected. In the meantime you can look the city over and this evening we can go to a theatre."

And so it came to pass after these two good friends had tried to forget their common troubles for two evenings at playhouses and Mrs. Upson, after the manner of her sex, had shopped all one day and bought only a few pairs of gloves, they departed from the city together.

Neither did they realize how by an almost miracle of chance a certain and much-wanted young girl saw them enter a theatre or what its effect upon her was.

The program as agreed upon was carried out and the trip to Conway Hollow a pleasant one for Mrs. Upson, for the haze of late Indian Summer days softened the rugged outlines of the grand old mountains surrounding it, a shade of yellow and scarlet still tinged the sloping hillsides and the crisp air added zest to the Barker House cuisine.

" Conway Hollow is a beautiful nook in the mountains," she declared when they met again at B——, " and its scenic attractions are wonderful. I took a long walk up the gorge and found myself almost spellbound by the towering cliffs that shut me in. They seemed so like a benediction just then and realizing how my poor, lonely, homeless child had been there all summer, woman-like I had a good crying spell. I haven't learned much," she added as if again on the verge of tears. " I introduced myself as an aunt of Miss Stone anxious to find her, but as you said she has kept her past, and future intentions, an absolute secret. Neither did this table waitress, Katie, know where Norah came from.

She thought it was Auburn or some place of similar name and Mr. Barker was as uncertain. This Norah wrote him in response to an advertisement for table girls, but he had lost the letter and couldn't recall where it was dated. The one and only tangible clue is this Mrs. Davis of Wheeling, West Virginia, who had stated that she had engaged Myrtle for a companion to her invalid daughter. I have already written Mrs. Davis an almost pitiful letter and am hopeful she will solve the mystery. If not, then Myrtle is with Norah and find Norah we must. The one most certain proof that they may be together is, it is believed by the Barkers, that Myrtle had been converted to Catholicism by Norah who was a most devout Catholic, and naturally they would keep in touch with one another."

"I don't see but that we are back again to where I left off to find Norah," and Mark sighed, as if the problem was hopeless.

"There are exactly forty-one Cassidy families in Auburn," he added smiling, "with fifteen Norahs in them, not one our Norah. If the same ratio holds in other mill towns I can see my finish — an insane asylum."

"Oh, don't despair, my dear Mr. Mason," responded his companion who felt in less mood for a joke. "We must find her, or I shall never have another happy hour in my life! You can't understand my feelings," she added wistfully, "I am a mother whose only child has suddenly risen as from the dead."

"Yes, I realize it," Mark returned more soberly, "and you must pardon my jest. In spite of my own longing, my all-day pursuit of the Cassidy families had a comical side you see. And now what do you say to going to Folly Island?" he added after a pause. "It's not far from here, perhaps seventy-five miles, we can stop at Burrville, call on the old farmer who was so good to poor Myrtle, and drive from there to Folly Island."

"Oh, I couldn't meet my father now," interposed Mrs. Upson hurriedly, "I should forget he was my father may be and — and — oh I couldn't! He was, I have always felt, responsible for my mother's death, he practically forced me to run away and to my ruin; and now comes this last outcome of his brutality. No, I never want to look upon my father's face again."

"But why did you —" Mark rejoined and then paused for it was impossible to question the past action of this woman. She had suffered enough.

"Oh, I know what you would ask," she asserted hastily, "and that is how I came to leave my babe with him! I tell you I hated it then, God forgive me. It seemed a curse, a punishment, and he responsible for it. Oh, I was almost insane then I assure you!"

"Well, forget it all, forget it I tell you," Mark emphasized, "and let us solve and end our present trouble, my dear sister."

Mark wasn't used to the vagaries of womankind and this quite contrawise exhibition of feeling was unexplainable.

"I have a possible hope," he added soothingly, "that Myrtle may have returned to this good old farmer Cony, or written him and as for your father, or Sandy Bay people, no one need know who you are. You have changed so much since a girl, you can wear a thick veil, I can assert you are my sister, and so you see you can go with me and no one be the wiser. You need not even meet your father face to face. He will avoid me, you may be sure, if he can, and sees me first, for he will imagine I am after him for money."

"Yes, I presume so," responded Mrs. Upson, who had already been told about the mortgage, "but going there would be like visiting a cemetery where a horrible and hated past was buried."

"But you'd like to see Myrtle's flower garden would'nt you," Mark inquired tenderly, "and her playhouse?"

"Oh yes," she rejoined eagerly, "and — and I will go with you if you wish."

Mark could see she was biting her lips now, and manlike he set out to avoid the inevitable tears.

"Well," he said hastily, and jerking out his watch, "we have just about time for dinner and the afternoon train for Burrville. We can stay in the little hotel there, call on Farmer Cony in the evening, and start early next morning for Folly Island. We shall need to, for it's nearly twenty miles across country, I guess, with sandy roads. Now when we get to Burrville," he cautioned, "I shall assert that you are my sister, you must not show undue emotion at the Conys' or anywhere, and all will go well as I plan it if you act the sister rôle, and as if interested in me mainly." Then Mark, well versed in the world's ways, and the fine art of dissembling if need be, smiled at his companion.

"I think I can assume the part successfully," she answered also smiling now, "for I feel it anyway and will reserve my tears until we visit poor Myrtle's playhouse. You will let me give way there won't you?"

"Oh yes, you can weep there all you must," he admitted, "and feel I am with you in spirit for I shall be. It was the pathos of that little hut that first inspired my — my need of Myrtle."

But Mrs. Upson was not an over-chatty companion during the three-hour ride to Burrville, for the coming adventure with all the old memories it was likely to evoke, was not a particularly pleasant one to anticipate. Mark, versatile man that he was, tried all sorts of topics foreign to what was in her mind. He described Good Will Farm, his early life there, Mr. Hinckley and his self-sacrificing devotion to his work and what he had done; gave a dissertation on philanthropy in general and how few accomplish more than to perpetuate their name in small degree; tried politics, business, and the growth of the trusts; but no subject seemed to interest his companion. Her mind was on Folly Island and all that made her girlhood an unhappy memory and finally Mark gave it up and betook himself to the smoking car and solace in a cigar. She was more companionable after the Burrville House was reached but scarce uttered a dozen words during the call on Farmer Cony. Here, also, Mark saw her bite her lips again while the old farmer described how he found "the poor gal clean tuckered out in the bushes," and when his wife as a climax to the story, produced Myrtle's old and well-worn men's shoes, Mrs. Upson lost control of herself and the tears came.

Little did those two worthy old people realize, that the mature and well-gowned lady Mark had introduced as "my sister, Mrs. Upson," was this runaway girl's mother! Only that she must be of an unusually tender and sympathetic nature.

"I never had nothin' quite so techin' as findin' that gal in the bushes," Farmer Cony declared after the story had been told and retold in every detail by him. "'N' then she sorter took me 'n' mother by storm, ez it war, in no time 'n' so I was ready to 'dopt her thar 'n' then. I tried my best to keep her," he added sadly, "'n' I'd a gi'n her good wages just to hev her round, she war that takin' in her ways."

"I wished we could 'a' kept her," Mrs. Cony sighed with ample dimensions, "for 'twould a saved a heap o' trouble 'n' worry," and then perforce Mark had to go all over the manner and method of his search so far and its outcome.

"I was in hopes she might have come back to you," he added in conclusion, "or written, may be. We are going to drive to Folly Island so my sister can see that barren spot."

"Wal, 'tain't an over-comfortin' one," Farmer Cony asserted, "an' I don't wonder the gal run away from it. I druv down to Sandy Bay arter the gal left us," he added, glancing at Mark, "'n' jist axed one or two questions 'bout Cap'n Jud 'n' his family.

I never let on 'bout the gal, though, for we promised her we never would. They think down thar she drownded herself 'n' they say Cap'n Jud has never sot foot in Sandy Bay since. That 'twouldn't be safe fer him if he did. I s'pose ye know all 'bout that, though?"

"I do," answered Mark, "and I shall not contradict the story now and may never do so."

Then he glanced at Mrs. Upson who he knew was unaware of this outcome of Myrtle's departure.

"Thar's 'nother thing," Mr. Cony now added, looking curiously at Mrs. Upson and then at Mark, "'n' that is that gal had eyes jist like your sister — like ez two peas in a pod an'— an' I s'pose ye know, Mr. Mason, she called herself Iva Stone here don't ye. I found out what her name was, though, at Sandy Bay."

"Oh yes, I know," rejoined Mark hastily, "and that was all right, I told her to do it for reasons."

The call was terminated soon after with handshakes all around and many good wishes from Farmer Cony and "mother." Mark also bore away the pitiful shoes Myrtle had left and when the hotel was reached Mrs. Upson had another burst of tears over them in the seclusion of her room.

And next morning they both started for Folly Island.

CHAPTER XXIX

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE

A WISE man once said "Conscience makes cowards of us all," which is true; a cynic said it is a matter of environment or the haphazard of birth, which isn't true, for it is but the line of demarkation separating man from beast. In some cases, also, the line curves upward and many a human being never betrays a vestige of it until the law removes him at a rope's end, while now and then a four-footed creature, human in every particular except power of speech, has a conscience well-defined and always active.

Captain Jud, however, had a conscience, but like late-grown plants it never matured until all who knew him believed he had none. Or rather every surrounding from baby days when his mother died and he grew up under the care of a brutal father who hated him, all experiences conspired to make him a brute also. At twelve he ran away from a home where to obtain food had been his only tie; he next obtained the promise of it and a vague something more if he joined a whaling vessel and did so; four years of this life served to develop and mature the worst in him, and never afterwards during his seafaring life was he aught except a cold, hard, selfish, bumptious brute, who never gave evidence of possessing a conscience or much that is human except fear of law. Folly Island with the thorn and proof of his daughter's shame as an added factor made him hate God and man all the more, his need of a woman's housekeeping aid all that made him tolerate his sister, but after the poor, helpless girl, who had grown up his slave, ended her life at the bridge — as he believed — a change, slow but sure came to him.

First, it was the missing of her day by day at the wharf when he returned from his solitary fishing trips and had so much more work to do. Next, the solemn monotone of the ocean, its moaning, bellowing, and when storms raged, its threatening voice, began to say things to him, and menacing ones at that! Then the half-solitude of his home and always reproachful eyes of his sister now played a part, and after that came the worst and final blow to his feelings; a belief that the spirit of this drowned girl was haunting the island, and oft he seemed to see her spectre outlined in the spray dashing over the rocks at twilight. Once, and the only time he ever visited her playhouse, he was sure he saw her dart from it, leap down over the near-by cliff and scream. He heard her footsteps on the wharf many a time when he came in late after dark, heard them in the fish-house or scampering away on the pebbly beach in front of it, and time and again saw her in his dreams or heard her voice. No admission of this insidious, carking fear, this ghostly haunting ever fell from his lips, but he became a changed man, and from the day Mark presented himself and hurled scornful truths at him, a realization of his own guilt began to assail him. Then, too, as the winter drew near his health began to fail, his joints to stiffen with rheumatism, his strength to leave him and he to realize that grim death would soon claim him for a victim. He also now feared that and all it meant as never before, and to see himself face upward in a coffin and buried for his eternal sleep. To wonder if he would be conscious of that awful moment or ever after and who would mourn for him. There were none who would, as he now began to think, and then the unsolved problem of a future existence also recurred to him. He had been an infidel and scoffer all his life. He had called God a myth of the imagination, religion the palaverings of fools and hypocrites, had scorned the idea and existence of either heaven or hell or that conscious existence continued beyond death. But now as he felt the dread shadow of it nearing him, a change in his opinions followed. It might have been ghostly fear, or dread of the grave, or both; coupled with an awakening conscience, but something, some occult influence was now pursuing him, he realized, and he scarce dared turn around quickly lest he find himself face to face with a grim spectre, and to hope that God's existence might not be a myth after all but an actual reality. Also that he would continue a personage beyond death.

With this awakening, mainly an outcome of fear, came another and that, how brutal he had been to his own flesh and blood, his daughter, Myrtle, and in turn to her deserted child. He began to see himself as he was, a cold, selfish, merciless brute without one throb or thrill of heart-impulse in him! To realize that he alone had driven, first the mother away, and then her child; to end a miserable life — made so by him — in the swirling eddies under the bridge. To see her sinking there with one last despairing look up, aye, hear her gasp for one more breath as the pitiless water choked her! Many a time had this scene returned to torture him, now it became an ever present one in waking hours, and even made sleep hideous.

His waning strength and stiffened joints these

November days also kept him from fishing. He could no longer readily launch or at least draw his dory out of the water, or when he did could swing the oars without intense pain in back and arms. He began to grow afraid of wind and wave, to see himself grasped by these forces and swept far to seaward to starve or be engulfed by them, and slowly to become a helpless, cowardly man, afraid to live and more afraid to die.

And this was Captain Judson Baldwin, the once brave if brutal sailor, who feared neither wave, storm, or the wrath of God but now reduced to an almost helpless, ghost-haunted, death-dreading, craven, despised by all who knew him.

But worse fear and greater punishment were yet to come.

CHAPTER XXX

ON A LONELY ROCK-BOUND COAST

Never before had Mark begun a day's journey so oppressed as when he and his companion, Mrs. Upson, started for Folly Island. The day was a fair November one when summer seems parting from life in balmy haze and ambient sky with halo of scarlet and brown. A last warm embrace of mellow sunshine and glowing color. The road, seldom traveled, led through miles of scrub oak whose tinted leaves rustled in the soft breeze, or across wide expanses of sand upon which grew scattered patches of sedge grass. Now and then a clump of dwarfed pines was met, with the voice of the distant ocean murmuring through them like a requiem. Conversation between these two, both feeling much the same, was desultory at first and then Mrs. Upson, who really had the more reason for sadness, womanlike bethought herself to try to entertain Mark, as any cultured lady would by getting him to talk.

"I recall at our first meeting, Mr. Mason," she said, "how you extolled the Masonic fraternity and seemed proud to be one of them. Do many of you travelling men belong to the order?"

"No, I am sorry to say not," returned Mark, glad she had introduced this topic, "only a small percentage, to the best of my observation, and they the foremost of our class. I can't understand it, either, for I do not think any wise man can afford not to be a Mason! It's an order thousands of years old, the strongest and most far reaching socially and fraternally of any secret society known, the very best men in every community are within its folds, and how any sensible travelling man can stay out is beyond me. Then, again, to belong to it is an honor all good men should desire, its moral influence is beyond question, fully equal to that of the churches, and all in all Masonry is a religious conversion in a way. In fact, to believe in God, be a helping brother to all brother Masons, live right and do right, may be called its corner stones. Its precepts also are as praiseworthy and faith in God, hope for the millenium and charity towards all humanity fairly expresses them. Neither can any man assume the solemn obligations of Masonry without being made a better man and worthy of more respect."

"I see you are an enthusiastic one," smiled Mrs.

Upson, glancing at Mark, "and it was that which so won my confidence in you the day we first met. I also recalled the fact that a scoundrel I once knew asserted Masons were a band of hypocrites."

"Yes," interrupted Mark hastily, "a band that doubtless rejected him for ample reasons, as the fraternity always will. A few black sheep may now and then sneak in, but it's seldom. A man's habits, principles, and character are put on trial the moment he presents his application for Masonic degrees and it's hopeless if there is any serious question about them. It's that that has made the order the power it is.

"On the other hand, if a brother falls by the wayside, so to speak," added Mark a moment later, "and will show the slightest sign of regret and effort to do better, there are a thousand helping hands ready and anxious to assist him. 'Charity for all,' is a Masonic watchword."

"And can there be, is there any way in which, or by which your order can punish a scamp not in it?" queried Mrs. Upson, after a pause. "You know what I mean, Mr. Mason, and whom I mean."

"Why yes, plenty," Mark returned, smiling, "for while a Masonic lodge is not a law court its power is far more reaching in a quiet way, and once a scoundrel's dastardly act is circulated among Masons he will feel this power soon enough and in a way he won't enjoy. There are many doors in social and business life, Mrs. Upson. I know of whom and what you are thinking, so leave your wrongs to me. I can and will see they are avenged. And now," he added to change the subject, "where do you think Myrtle is? Where in your woman's intuition, or mother's rather, do you think we best go next?"

"I am utterly in the dark on that point," sighed Mrs. Upson, "for her steps are almost sure to be governed by one of two motives, to find you if she has faith you wanted her to do so; if not, she is either with this Norah or will keep her informed of where she is. The fact they went away together, that previous to that they were not only good friends but in religious sympathy, makes this course seem positive to me. As for Myrtle writing you or looking for you, it will all depend upon how much love-assurance you gave her. If she is like me in nature, which I assume is probable, she will never even write you unless very certain that you expected she would. How is it, Mr. Mason? Did you give her any positive expressions in that connection? It's a delicate question to ask a man, but my opinion of her actions hinges on that point."

"Mr. Hinckley asked the same question," returned Mark soberly, "and for the same reason. I have no concealments in the matter or anything to be ashamed of. I did not begin to desire Myrtle for my wife until after I left her. I did not give her any assurance of love — except a brother's or father's, and those are the facts. What I did for her however — you know what it was and how much — seems to me ample reason why she should trust me further and not feel reticence or reserve, at least to the extent of now ignoring me. She must know I meant to be an honorable friend and wished to help her."

"True enough," rejoined Mrs. Upson, earnestly, "and so you were. But a young girl's heart or the budding of her love is a peculiar illusion, an occult motive-force over which pride stands like an ogre. A menacing censor, as it were, saying no to ordinary reason and conduct. If assured she is loved, is wanted, she would almost fly to the arms of the man she loves; if not so assured and in positive words, no power on earth can make her take one step towards him. And the prouder-spirited she is, the firmer she will hold herself aloof."

"I guess it's find Norah first," sighed Mark, conscious now as never before how and where he stood in this heart affair. "I lost my golden chance when

I left Folly Island and trusted in a letter. Mr. Hinckley was right, and I was a fool."

"No," smiled Mrs. Upson, "not a fool. Only a thoughtless man not yet in love. A woman's heart is like a bit of wind-blown thistle down, to be caught as gently and quickly. Once the psychic moment comes within a man's reach it must be seized on the instant or lost."

For a long two hours more these two companions, joined in hopes and plans, discussed this one most pertinent yet elusive subject but never once reaching a probable solution. Myrtle's life at Conway Hollow, now fully known by Mrs. Upson, was gone over by her even to minute details none but a woman would find out. How secretive she was, how unapproachable, what people thought of her and why, how Mrs. Barker felt, the reason of Katie's jealousy, and a hundred other trifling facts. Then this fruitless subject was suddenly interrupted by a sign-board with "Sandy Bay two miles," facing them at cross-roads.

"Now you must prepare for familiar faces and your sister rôle," ejaculated Mark. "Also put on a cold, impassive stare."

"I shall try to look and act the part," she returned, producing a thick brown veil and winding it around face and hat, "and hope we shall neither meet or you be forced to speak to anyone you know. I feel fairly safe, however," she added sadly, "for it's over twenty years since I left Folly Island, an ill-clad girl, and I won't be recognized now, I am sure."

"Not so concealed, certainly," Mark rejoined, glancing at her, "and neither shall I give anyone much chance to speak to us. We will drive right through the village without a halt and on down to the bridge. Here I can hitch our horse and we can avoid going within sight of your old home by following the shore down to the point where poor Myrtle built her playhouse. I am sure you would not care to meet your father now, and I have no wish to."

"I do and I do not," she answered slowly, "or rather I have only a morbid curiosity to see how much he has changed. While he is still my father, his cruelty so wrecked my life that all filial love died long ago. If I could see him and he not know it, I would like to," she added after a pause, "but I presume that would be impossible."

"Better not try it," Mark rejoined tersely, "for with his insane temper there is no telling what he would do."

The drive through Sandy Bay was, as she expected, a painful ordeal to Mrs. Upson, yet a brief one, for Mark hurried on and she had time only for a mere glance at Orton's store, the canning factory, the one church and scattered houses,— all familiar to her — while Mark watched her covertly. It was a trying one as well for despite her veil Mark saw that her face was drawn and lips set the while and once when he chanced to touch her arm he fancied it trembled. A sigh of relief escaped her also after the last house was passed.

"I am so glad no one met us in the road," she then exclaimed almost elated, "for I felt like Lady Godiva, or as if all my painful past was exposed to Sandy Bay."

And then Mark glanced at her with a new curiosity for the complex outcome of her life and feelings was beyond him. More than that and in so trusting herself and them with him, she had shown the same blind faith and intuitive confidence Myrtle had at the outset and equally flattering. It made no difference, however. His sense of honor was so keen she could confide her very soul as it were in him with never a fear of betrayal. For that was Mark Mason.

"You know my shibboleth in all cases of what we can't help?" he rejoined, after the long pause.

"Why no, what is it?"

"Forget it, my friend, forget it and think of something else," he answered encouragingly. "There's two things it doesn't pay to worry about in life, those troubles we can help and those we can't. If you can help them, do it, if not, forget them. Now you can't help your blind trust in a villain and its result. You are not the first girl so wronged, you won't be the last one, so forget it. There is another possible outcome to your life," he continued assuringly, "you are not, as I understand it, in anyway obligated to remain in Glendale or maintain your home there. Those grown-up children of Mr. Upson's have means, relations, and can shift for themselves. Now we are going to find Myrtle if I live to do it, and then I am satisfied you will make a most desirable mother-in-law for us. They are not so as a rule, according to the professional joke-makers, but my opinion is otherwise," and then Mrs. Upson gave him a grateful look and winked away the mist from her eyes.

She wasn't used to having a big, strong, manly man talk to her that way.

At the bridge Mark halted, hitched their docile steed to a convenient sapling and helped his companion out of the carriage.

"Here is where Myrtle and I did a little courting," he now asserted jocularly, "and talked moony, moony talk two blissful hours. I assure you also I felt like a bashful schoolboy and didn't even dare kiss her — not once. I wish I had now," he added candidly, "but she was so tender and confiding I was afraid to shock her so."

"You are unlike most men," Mrs. Upson returned smiling at his admission. "They seem to think the sooner they can assume such intimate relations, the better and that a young girl's modesty must be overcome at sight."

But such pleasant badinage now seemed out of place to both these two and their errand here a serious matter. Mark was made to feel it so by his companion's sobered face, at least, and soon led the way around the shore of Folly Island opposite to the wharf and down to the Cove where Myrtle had fed her gulls. Here they ascended the bolder cliff and halted beside the inlet.

"There," he said pointing to a niche in the rocks, "was where Myrtle sat the first time I spoke to her and — barefoot. You now have also, in the carriage, the very same shoes I saw that day beside her and which she wore away from the island."

"Yes, poor child," sighed her mother, "and I shed penitent tears over them last night."

"I beg your pardon," returned Mark hastily, realizing his error, and not another word of what he now saw would pain her fell from his lips while on the island. To him, also, this visit now seemed like one to a cemetery and that sad impress was accentuated by the poor, pitiful hut he next led his companion to. It had not changed nor been disturbed during all the months since he and this fisher-maid had met beside it. Like a little temple of loneliness, a monument to childhood days it still peeped out of its coign above the wide, solemn ocean. The grass, no longer trodden, had grown thick about it; a few weeds now choked its doorway, vines brown and withered had climbed over it and, most pitiful touch of all, a tiny bed of dead leaves had been wind-swept into it. The little old backless chair was still within, the box still held its four books, but a coating of gray mold covered chair and box and books alike.

Mrs. Upson had said she would reserve her tears for this pathetic handiwork of her child and she had done so. But now as she stood beside it, realizing its mute message of lonely hours spent in its building, and how right here, with only the sad sea waves for company, her own deserted babe, a child woman-grown, had found satisfaction in a solitude that yet was pathetic; the tears came and sobs as well that shook her frame as none in her life before ever had!

And well they might, for here, in this lone rock-environed niche with only God and the wide ocean for companions, her own child had found what few children can find, a consolation in solitude and the building of a playhouse. And how more than pitiful, almost tragic, that poor hut now seemed to this mother. Bit by bit even as its walls had been erected, so now its silent voice reached her heart. Aye, even as the grass-grown mound above some loved one reaches all our hearts, so this reached hers until with the stifled sobs of a mother's love she knelt beside it in a paroxysm of sorrow to clasp and caress its cold stones. Even Mark, strong man that he was, felt his own eyes grow misty, for this girl had grown into his very soul during these long, weary, waiting months, and somehow, despite all hope, it now seemed as if he were standing beside her grave. More than that, the mournful booming of billows just below them and far up the shore sounded like a dirge and the incessant rattle of wave-washed pebbles like that of bones.

The little garden, too, just back and above here they next visited, only added pathos, for most of its water-starved flowers had died from thirst, the rest had yielded to frost and their dry brown leaves were blowing away. Only a mere glance did Mrs. Upson give this and then turned to Mark.

"I've seen enough to almost break my heart," she said, "but somehow I can't go away without a look at the wharf and fish-house where my child was made to slave. Do you think I can?"

"Perhaps," responded Mark glancing around over the ocean, "your fa — Cap'n Jud, I mean, may be, most likely is away fishing to-day, it being so warm, and we can go up the island and reconnoitre. If he isn't to be seen anywhere I guess you can risk it safely. I'll go on ahead as a sort of spy. I think," he added after a moment's consideration, "you had best go to the wharf alone and meet me later at the bridge for obvious reasons."

And so it came to pass that Mark, after seeing the coast was clear or no one at the wharf, so signalled his companion and then betook himself by a circuitous course back to the bridge again, lit a cigar and sat down to contemplate the inflowing tide and live over the pathetic memories clustering about the spot. A more pathetic and retrospective episode was at the same time being enacted at the wharf for Mrs. Upson finding it deserted and feeling herself safely alone here, began a hurried examination of the premises with now and then a furtive glance toward the house whose upper part only was visible. The wharf, its weed-draped float, the weather-beaten fishhouse and old barnacled wreck forming a sea barricade for all, had not changed much since her girlhood days. The same piles of wreckage, rusting anchor chain, broken lobster pots, rotting fish nets, and flotsam of a fisherman's calling were scattered all about, and even more makeshift and untidy than when she, as a girl, also slaved here. A few more worse-for-use pots, broken oars, and more gathered wreckage may be, with a stove-in dory bottom-up behind a rock formed all the change she could recall, and for the rest it was as in the long ago of her life and as offensive to eyes and nose. But it held a certain pathos, also, for here she had grown to young womanhood amid filthy and abhorrent surroundings. And now seating herself in a convenient hollow in the side of a boulder back of the fish house somewhat out of sight from the wharf — a niche attractive in her young days because of its shaded seclusion — she began to live them over once more. They were not such as she cared to dwell upon long, not even the few school days at Sandy Bay, poisoned as they were by all that awaited her here. But come back now they would in spite of will or wishes, a series of blank, hopeless days with never a shred of love or tenderness in them until the end came in a carefully planned going away. A deliberate, desperate step to escape Folly Island. And then its outcome, her chance meeting with and hasty wooing by a handsome man. Her almost insane step, a marriage within a few days, and without a single witness — all a part of his plot as she afterwards realized — and then its finale of soul-searing shame, tears, entreaties, curses even, and the almost delirious state of mind that followed when she came here afoot one moonlight night to escape its burden and leave her babe as a reproach and taunt to her father. Like a curse, her own act had now returned to smite her, and she now realized that all the bitters tears so far shed this day were but a just punishment.

And then her recent awakening from this moral lethargy now came back, and as she lived over the horror of her own life here; conscious that she herself had meted the same to her helpless child, all the cruelty of that act, its unspeakable cowardice and worse than selfishness also returned. For years she had lived but to forget all this and her own crime. For years she had put it away believing it was a dead and gone past, a sin she would never be called upon to expiate. But like Banquo's ghost it had risen up to confront her, aye, pursue her all through life in vengeance. And now with everything about her to remind her of the utter atrocity of her act, she could only sit and suffer in dumb, hopeless, helpless, silent misery; scarce conscious of where she was or the lapse of time. She had meant to remain here only five minutes at most, in reality her living over bygones and all the self-reproaches following consumed an hour and then she awoke to the fact she had tarried longer than she ought and rose to leave the spot.

And now a queer thing happened, for Cap'n Jud — enfeebled as he was by many months of haunted, almost sleepless nights and oft seeing the spectral face of his grandchild here or elsewhere — had entered the cove unobserved by Mrs. Upson, drawn his dory out upon the float and barefoot as usual walked noiselessly up the wharf just as she stepped out upon it from behind the fish-house. Neither saw the other until this moment and then their eyes met. And now one instant of utter, unspeakable horror, came to him, for he saw, not the flesh-and-blood woman staring at him in sudden dismay, but the spectral form of his own child confronting him! One moment was his tottering reason able to stand this awful, unexpected strain; the next it fled, and with a curse and yell of terror he sprang from the wharf and ran for the house as if demons pursued.

And Mrs. Upson, shocked as never before by what almost seemed the ghost of her father sank to the wharf in a swoon. Only for a moment did it last, then recovering, she, too, ran from the accursed spot and up to the bridge with never a halt for breath!

"Why, what has happened?" Mark almost demanded when she reached it panting, "You look as if you had met a ghost!"

"I have," she gasped, "the ghost of my father, I thought for a moment, and he I am sure believed I was an actual one!"

"I hope so," Mark returned grimly, "and that he will never learn otherwise. My wish is that he may have all the mental suffering he so well deserves and that never again will he know peace of mind."

And then they drove away from the this ill-omened spot and not until Sandy Bay was well behind and they reached the seclusion of the seldom traveled, bush-bordered road once more, did either speak and then it was Mark.

"Folly Island, Folly Island," he then exclaimed in derision as if addressing it, "and rightly named you are! Two lives wrecked upon you, the home of a human brute as well and now a spot accursed of God and man!"

"But the sun may shine and happiness come to you and someone else there sometime," responded his companion softly, "so do not scoff at inanimate rocks. You may even feel thankful you first set foot on it, some day. Let us hope so at least."

"Yes, let us hope so," he returned grimly, "but it all hinges on finding someone."

CHAPTER XXXI

ONE GRAIN OF SAND

A GREAT city is a beast, a monster Gorgon, alluring, fascinating, nerve-destroying, merciless. A huge hive of restless, selfish, almost heartless humanity, ever pushing and crowding one another in a mad pursuit of dollars and pleasure, and Athens was no exception. It had, as stated, a superior cult who made a pretense of moral activity and literary acumen, who supported its churches munificiently, and ignored the tens of thousands who barely kept soul and body together or else were forced to sell souls to save their bodies.

It had a mayor, also, who prated about a "bigger, busier, better" Athens, and zealously advertised himself and the city. It had law and order, as well, in the persons of many well-fed policemen who pocketed a rake-off for protecting vice and crime, and bellowed at and browbeat poor wretches for trifling sins. It had a district attorney whose principal asset was fluency of speech, and sole ambition, political advancement, and to keep in the limelight by any and every pretense. It also had taxes galore, fully one-third of which were disbursed in graft, and a debt that was appalling. All of these Athens — like many another city — had, in ample supply, and into this modern Sodom and Gomorrah; this hive of selfishness, conceit, much vice and little virtue; Myrtle Baldwin, the erstwhile waif of Folly Island had now domiciled herself to earn an honest living. Her wits were keen, experience nil, heart tender and her sole means to combat this crowd was a willingness to work, a scant wardrobe, and about forty dollars in money above the one hundred she had faithfully saved from her wages to pay Mark Mason — sometime.

He also, was the actual and only magnet that had drawn her into this vortex; to go to his office some day when she could muster the courage had been her intent; and then to say "Here is your money, I have kept faith with you in all ways and obeyed your orders as well." This and so much she had planned to do and could without shame; for the rest and her future it must all turn upon how he received her then. But now after four months of neglect from him her courage began to fail and she to feel such a step nearly impossible.

And yet she still owed him this money?

Almost her first act after securing a position at

"The Emporium" had been to examine a directory and "Mark Mason, Forty-two Bank Street, Residence, The Elms," had given her a keen thrill of joy. At least this great city held one man who had been both good and tender to her and for whom she would almost give her soul in recompense. But he had never answered her letter! In her innocence she supposed he must have received it, and pride now became a barrier to seeking him. On the other hand, she felt that she must return this loan — he had said it was one to be given back and it must be. But again that necessitated going to him, and once more pride made her hesitate and put it off until some future day, or perhaps she might meet him going or coming from her work. That also now became an imprisonment from eight-thirty until six with half an hour for lunch, and the walk to M street, two miles, consumed another hour. The question of ways and means was also another factor in her new life. After paying room rent she had less than two dollars left for meals each week, and scrimp or go hungry as she often did, even the poorest food cost more, and her little hoard of forty dollars began to grow less. Agnes, the bright little sixteen-year-old Cassidy girl, who dodged and darted about "The Emporium" like a sprite in calico, soon became an ardent admirer and friend of Myrtle, and as there was not much in city life her keen eyes had missed, she helped her accordingly.

"Shure there do be an aitin'-place in an alley two strates back o' the sthore wid iverything five cents" she said to her the first day Myrtle began her service, "an' if ye git yer 'come-out' at a quarter-past twelve as I do I'll wait at the dure for ye."

And wait she did, fifteen minutes of the thirty allowed her, for not until twelve-thirty did Myrtle escape and join her in five-cent food. Mrs. Cassidy, good soul that she was, came to Myrtle's rescue a week later with an offer of night and morning meals for one dollar and fifty cents a week which she accepted gladly. "We don't have much to ate, or much stoile," Mrs. Cassidy said, "just tay an' a bit o' mate an' bread for supper an' the same mornin's wid pertaty soup now an' thin. We don't be high livers."

It was more than fortunate, however, that Myrtle had blundered into M street and this poor but self-helpful Irish family — and all due to their name — for they were like most of that race, warm-hearted, honest, and ready to extend a helping hand to this friendless Yankee girl. Her own praise of this Norah Cassidy and her keen wit, also served to open their hearts and when Sunday came Mrs. Cassidy insisted that Myrtle should array herself in her best " an' go wid the girls to mass."

Somehow, too, the more pretentious Cathedral, magnificent fittings, and splendid singing with a heart-thrilling organ accompaniment, now seemed to fit in with Myrtle's present frame of mind. She was lonely, heart-hungry, life appeared a precarious matter, the world and this city a great terror-inspiring place, and she a mere mite of humanity with no one to turn to for anything. She could not understand the black or white robed priest's Latin, but she could feel with the vast audience, and why they bowed and knelt in abject reverence. The solemn music also carried her back to Folly Island as it had at Conway Hollow, and once again she heard the ocean's low booming monotone that rose and fell even like this great organ's tones. There she had shed silent tears, now they came again and somehow she felt, even as she did that night when kneeling beside her playhouse at parting; as if somewhere there must be a God who was watching over her.

And somehow also, when the solemn mass was all said, the organ lifted its voice into a more joyous tone, and she filed out with the throng, life seemed a little more hopeful and the world a trifle brighter.

And now came another link forged in the chain that was to bind her to these new friends, for the elder Cassidy girl, Mary Ann, watching her even as Norah had, read her face aright and spoke thus:

"Shure, Miss Stone," she said tenderly as they moved away from the church, "you do be havin' some heart trouble, I'm thinkin', an' axin' yer pardon, mebbe ye ain't at pace with yer own conscience. If ye'd like, I'll ax Father Mooney to call on us an' pray for ye. It'll aise yer heart, maybe."

"No, I thank you," returned Myrtle her heart leaping at this new and kindly interest, and suddenly resolving to unbosom her sorrows to these two girls, "I have never wronged any one and have no sins to confess. I have had troubles, though, and if you care to hear them you shall." And then — this November Sabbath being a balmy one — they halted in a little park on their way home and here Myrtle told, what she had only partially admitted to Norah and that, where she came from, how she left Folly Island and why she was so heart-hungry. Two items of this history she reserved, however, Mark's name and her own true one — but his interest in her and aid to escape she confessed in full. Also much of her life at Conway Hollow and how she had written him.

And she felt happier from so doing.

"But why don't ye go to him now?" Mary Ann queried when the tale was told. "Shure he do be a foine jintleman to help ye so widout, as ye say, yer iver givin' him a kiss to pay; an' ye have no cause for shame, ayther, as I kin see. If it was me I'd go to him to-morrow an' say, 'Here's yer money, sor; I'm an honest girl, but wud ye plase git me a place to arn decent wages ez me friend,' so I wud. An' he wud, too, or he ain't no jintleman."

"No," returned Myrtle, "I can't do that now, not yet. I have no reason to think he cares for me, he was only sorry, that was all. Some day when — when I — get over feeling as I do now I'll go to him with the money. But now I can't." And then as if to accentuate her quite plain admission she was forced to choke back a sob. But she had made two friends that from now on would fight for her and love her as loyal Irish hearts ever will through thick and thin. They may be selfish in some ways, considered superstitious by such as the blueblood cult of Athens, most certainly could never gain admission into its sacred precincts, and yet, once their hearts are won they are loyal to the core.

But the great city was as yet an unexplored tangle of avenues, streets, cross streets, and alleys to Myrtle, and her route from M street to the narrow crowded thoroughfare where "The Emporium" stood, was through the worst of this maze. She soon conquered it under Agnes' pilotage and then began evening sorties with that bright lass for companion, to see the other big store window shows, watch the crowds rushing into theatres, or the endless stream of humanity hurrying along sidewalks. By this — and a new world to Myrtle it was — she not only learned the city's streets but much more from Agnes. How the rich dressed, and amused themselves, how the poor lived, where Chinatown was and what infamies existed there, and what streets no young girls could enter after dark without probable insult. And in this connection Myrtle learned, almost from the outset, what a signal-light of danger to herself her own face and form were, for she and Agnes soon found themselves followed by one of the countless "mashers" who infest every city and worse than that, accosted by him. But Agnes was equal to the occasion and no insolent cur of that nature could scare her one iota.

"Ah, gwan, ye toad, 'n' mind yer business," she snarled at this one, "or I'll spit in yer face, ye insultin' puppy," and thus admonished he slunk away. It was not an elegant speech but it was Agnes all over, and well merited.

This incident also furnished her a text, to enlarge upon which she did at once, and coming from a sixteen-year-old lass whose education had been derived from a few years at a parochial school, six as bundle-carrier and errand girl in a big store and roaming the streets nights and Sunday afternoons, may well be quoted.

"Shure," she said as they strolled on "all the min-folks do be bad, I'm thinkin', an' if they ain't after girls they git dhrunk or go to gamblin' places to spind their money. An' the drinkin' places are so plinty, too, ivery other dure on the side streets is one an' the poor childers is left to go barefoot an' starve. Thin thar's the bad houses so plinty wid girls as bad as min an' thim places where Chinks live is the worst of all. I've seen great ladies go there to ate the nasty things they cook, rats, mice and kittens, they say, an' smoke — hit the pipe they call it, an' foine jintlemen wid 'em comin' in ortomobiles. An' thin there's places where rich men spind all night dhrinkin' an' gamblin', club rooms they call 'em, an' I've seen 'em comin' out in the mornin' whin I'm goin' to work so dhrunk they was lifted into a keerige. An' sometimes they had wimmen wid 'em too! Thin ye read about them min forgin' an' stealin' money from banks ivery day or two an' graftin' they call it, stalin' money from the city wid contracts an' the loike an' me countin' me beads ivery night an' mornin' an' gittin' only four dollars a week wages. An' those that's worse off starvin'!

Shure it ain't right, as me mither says, an' Father Mooney he says the divil is after the whole wurld! I think he do be gettin' most of 'em shure goin' to purgatory whin they die. An' the foine ladies wid their illigent dresses an' where do they git all the money to spind I'd like to know, while me mither has hard wurruk to pay the rint?"

It was a problem, or, seemed so to Myrtle now, and with it a clearer realization of her own helpless condition in this great and certainly wicked city. Her own wages, not even enough quite to live on, now seemed a rank injustice in the face of the nine hours' daily imprisonment she endured to earn it waiting on these same "foine ladies" Agnes railed against. And what should she do if deprived of it or taken sick? Life at Folly Island had been slavery, it was true, yet that had not driven her away; only because she was hated and despised for a sin not her own. But here she was facing a worse situation and scarce earning enough to live upon. Then the — as she began to realize — quite foolish heart-interest that brought her here now seemed a reproach. This man, Mark Mason — a hero in her eyes at Folly Island — now according to Agnes must be, no doubt was no better than those men who spent their nights in drinking and gambling.

But the loyalty of heart that was hers had kept asserting itself in spite of these cynical conclusions, she could not and would not quite believe him to be like the men Agnes sneered at, only he did not care enough for her to answer her letter and most likely had now forgotten her. She had also watched for his face continuously every morning, noon, and night for three weeks, Sundays as well going and returning from church with the Cassidy girls, but all the return was added heart-ache. And then one Sunday afternoon — sure of herself amid the tangle of streets and led by an insidious longing — she started alone for Bank Street. It was easily reached and now practically deserted; Number Forty-two proved to be an imposing building devoted to offices; on the marble signs flanking its entrance she read "Mark M. Mason, Cotton and Wool Broker, Room 210," and a strange, eerie mingling of gratitude and heartache came to her as she did so. No person was within sight, she knew that she was all alone in this broad, arched entrance and while her eyes rested on that name, back went her thoughts and heart to Folly Island. Once more was she lifting the heavy boxes of salted fish and spreading them while he watched her. Once again, and later, waiting for him at her playhouse. And now he was beside her there, looking at her with his big, brown, honest eyes, and telling her what a cold, selfish spot the great world was and what she had to fear. Then she saw him draw forth a roll of money as if it was as valueless as a cigar and taking five ten-dollar bills from it, hand them to her with cautionary advice. And now she was once more beside him on the bridge gazing out upon the ethereal moonlit ocean while he again explained how she must leave the island and when and where to meet him. And then came the last parting, how he held her hand and looked down into her eyes so tenderly, and the wondrous new-born joy that thrilled her at this moment!

And now she was bidding good-bye to her little hut at midnight, kneeling and kissing its cold stones and asking some Unseen Power to help her in this desperate hour. Then her flight with all its fears and exhaustion, her crawling into bushes to hide and sleep like some hunted beast, her rescue by the kind farmer, its outcome, and life at Conway Hollow. And then she began to count the months that had elapsed since her new, fitful, half unhappy, and wholly scared life began. One, two, three, four, months it was and yet a seeming lifetime! And now the neglect of this friend, how he must have aided her only from momentary pity, and had, surely must have, forgotten her now, once more assailed her. With that also came her own longing for him, how he must have seen and known it only to ignore her letter and let her shift for herself. And then a shame for it all reddened her face and neck, and biting her lips to keep back tears of humiliation and loneliness she hurried away from the spot.

But her penance was not quite ended. He had gone out of her life, face it alone, almost, she must in this great city, and yet, so peculiar is such a renunciation, something now impelled her to go to "The Elms" where he lived. Not close to it, oh no; only near enough to see the abode that sheltered him. It was soon found, a half-mile away on a broad avenue, and a pretentious four-story, brownstone apartment house, with many bay windows and two small elms at outer corner of its little courtyard. No one was visible about it, lace curtains were drawn inside of most of its windows, or else shutters, a few flowers within one gave the only touch of color to relieve its bare, blank sameness, and an elderly fat woman glancing out of a second-story window was its only apparent occupant. It was an abiding-place for rich boarders, evidently, and not a hotel, for this much Myrtle concluded while walking leisurely past it on the opposite sidewalk and returning a few moments later. Then she gave it a longer, lingering look further on, with a last faint hope that the one most-wanted face in all the world might even now be seen. But no! and with a sigh like one turning from the grave of some loved companion in life, so Myrtle now turned!

And that night in the seclusion of her poor little second-story back room, she shed bitter, scalding tears of utter loneliness and heart-hunger, and wished herself back at Conway Hollow, or better still at the old farmer's home to be his servant for life.

A worse blow to her heart came a few evenings later, however, while standing just within a doorway near a theatre entrance with Agnes and watching the crowd of well-groomed men and handsomely gowned ladies hurrying in. They two were in shadow, Myrtle nearest the stream of people, when who should walk up and wheel in but Mark and a middle-aged lady, modestly attired with big, soulful eyes and walking close beside him! He passed not ten feet from where Myrtle stood, glanced down into her upraised face one instant and kept on, without a halt, a second look, or any sign that he knew her!

And Myrtle! For one moment it seemed that all the joy and sorrow of her life was condensed into a single heart-throb that tore her very soul asunder!

One second it lasted, the next she wheeled, staggered and clasping Agnes' arm gasped —"Let us go home, dear, I — I am faint."

"But what took ye so suddint?" queried that irrepressible as they moved away. "Ye look like a dead un that white, so ye do.

"I know," she added more postively, "it's the aitin' that did it, me darlin', that's what! Ye ain't used to our vittles."

But it wasn't the "aitin'."

It was the death-blow to poor Myrtle's months of hope, love, heart-hunger and soul-starvation!

CHAPTER XXXII

A DEATH-BLOW TO LOVE

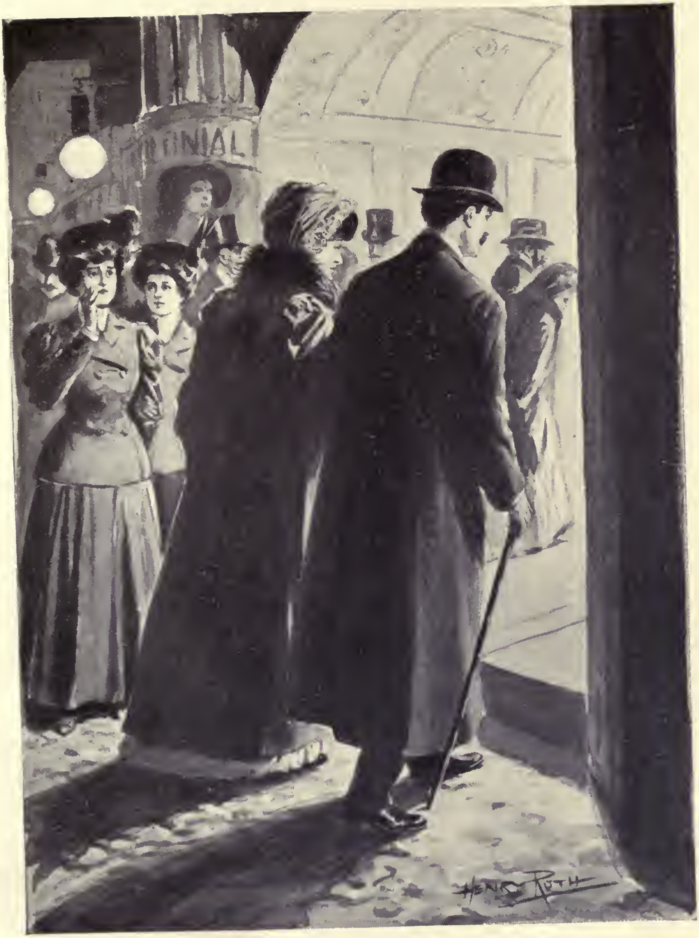
Myrtle was wrong of course in her sudden conclusion that Mark meant to ignore her, for he never saw her at all — at least to recognize her. She stood in shadow, the bright glare of light from the theatre lobby shone full in his face, and all he saw was two poorly clad girls watching the crowd. And to add an almost tragic pathos to this unfortunate episode, the lady he was escorting was Mrs. Upson, the mother of Myrtle!

But its effects were the same as if he had ignored her and if ever a poor, love-lorn, helpless waif was made to suffer it was this one! And yet, despite her heart-anguish, she was still loyal to her promise and not a word of disclosure to Agnes fell from her lips that night, or later to her friends at home. To suffer in silence and alone was her nature. Had she told her feelings there would have been a scene at Mark's office in short order, for one or the other of these with true Irish spunk would have gone to him and said things he would — in this case have given thousands of dollars to have heard!

But Fate or the fortunes of love willed otherwise.

And now another, insidious, sinister, yet quite common influence, in the shape of this fellow, Parsons, manager of "The Emporium" hosiery department, began to take shape and assault Myrtle's feelings. Her duties there had been easily learned, merely to be quick of eye and handy in showing her wares to as many as possible in each day's rush, smile and say "Thank you," to each purchaser and fill out her sales slips correctly. She also had qualities that at the outset won friends among the other salesgirls, was willing and anxious to help them, wore such simple raiment — all she had — and not one scrap of jewelry — that they found no cause for jealousy; and while they perked and decorated themselves with cheap rings, neck chains, and gaudy combs galore after the manner of most salesgirls she was simplicity personified. Neither did she need such adornments, for her shapely hands — whiter than on Folly Island — her splendid head of jet-black hair, expressive eyes, sweet mouth, and perfect form would have made jewelry ill chosen and quite superfluous.

Mr. Arthur Parsons —"Artie" he always asked the girls in his department to call him — was a con-



He passed not ten feet from where Myrtle stood. —*Page 375.*

ceited jackanapes, a coxcomb, a soulless, selfish rake, whose entire stock-in-trade was fairly good looks, plenty of assurance, stylish clothing, (which he was slow to pay for) and a moustache that he curled once in ten minutes on an average. He also had a few other things; a plated watch and chain, horseshoe stick pin, snake ring — fit emblem of his nature — and a record for keeping no girls in his department unless they yielded to his persuasions. He was not long in recognizing Myrtle's attractions, within an hour he began to call her Iva, before night had almost offended her by his many impertinent questions, the next morning he brought her a small bunch of flowers — which she tucked under her counter and let stay there — and a few days later he asked if he might call on her. She promptly declined the honor with the reasonable excuse that the family in M street would not allow her callers. His next proposal was that she go to supper with him some evening in the near future, then to the theatre afterwards. This she also refused on the ground she had no dress suitable for such public appearances. He kept repeating his invitation, making it for a supper only now, and with that a succession of bare, bald, fulsome flatteries, and assertions of love quite nauseating to her.

But Myrtle was growing wise quite rapidly. Her experience at Conway Hollow had been the primer of self-protection, Norah's sage and shrewd assertions about "fellys" and advice regarding them was the second reader and now Agnes with her precocious distrust of city men clinched the lessons, as it were. But that keen and saucy little lass had now resigned her "bundle girl" position at "The Emporium" for better wages where her sister worked, so Myrtle was left to walk home each night alone.

Her sudden admirer, or pursuer, was not long in discovering this fact and utilizing it. He had scant chance in the store, for the moment closing time came Myrtle, Agnes, and every one of the "saleslady" army scattered in short order, but now Myrtle departing alone gave him an opportunity.

"I suppose, Iva, you will be glad to have company part way home, now that your running-mate has deserted you," he said to her with easy effrontery and joining her outside the store a few nights later. But Myrtle unaccustomed to word-sparring made no reply.

"I can't see why you are so afraid of me," he continued in a hurt tone, "I've coaxed you several times to go to supper and theatre but it's no go. Why is it?"

"I told you, sir, I have no clothes fit for going to those places," she answered pleasantly as perforce she must, "and — and I'd rather not."

"Oh, nonsense!" he responded petulantly, "that's only an excuse. Either I ain't good-looking enough or you have another fellow. Have you?"

"I have no fellow," she returned defiantly, "and I don't want any."

"Well, you are good, ain't you," he almost sneered, "but I know better. Every pretty girl wants a fellow and most want a string of 'em, so that don't go."

"But I mean it, sir," she asserted earnestly, "I have no nice dresses like the ladies I see going into theatres and I can't go." She dared not tell him she feared him — he was practically her employer — her intuitions told her that he meant no good toward her, and in a way she was still afraid of all who wore male raiment.

"Well, suppose we cut the theatre out," he continued, more coaxingly, "and have supper together right now? I know a nice place, cozy little rooms all to ourselves, and we can eat and visit as long as we choose. No one will see how you are dressed there and I want to get better acquainted with you."

In an instant Norah's advice, "They'll want to take ye out aitin' an' to shows but don't ye go wid 'em, don't ye do it," recurred to Myrtle with startling suddenness.

"No I thank you, Mr. Parsons," she almost pleaded, "it's kind of you to ask me but — but I'd rather not. I am only a poor girl with few friends here and those I have would be shocked if I made so free with you."

A man of Parsons' character and position will inevitably, as the farmers say, "drive his wedge butt-end foremost," i. e. try effrontery first and coaxing afterwards on a girl. And now this selfish coxcomb tried coaxing.

"But, my dear girl," he responded, "I mean no harm by asking you to sup with me. You say you can't have me call where you live. I have fallen in love with you, as I tell you, and all I want is a chance to visit with you. I can't do it in the store, so there is only this way left."

And now Myrtle felt herself cornered in a way. To refuse this fellow who could discharge her if he chose was a risky matter — many a poor shop-girl has been ruined through the same fear — to go with him was to expose herself to probable insult, and so she hestitated before answering. Then the courage that had led her to escape Folly Island asserted itself.

"No," she answered firmly, "when I came here a few weeks ago I found a home with a poor but good woman who would turn me away, I guess, if she knew I went to supper alone with you and I dare not do it now."

"That's funny," he laughed, "to be so afraid of your landlady. And now in order she may see I haven't any horns or hoofs, suppose you let me call once for luck. You are foolish, Iva," he continued, patronizingly, "you haven't any beau, you say. I doubt you ever was in a theatre here and you might as well let me take you round some. There's another thing," he added insinuatingly, "you get only five a week now. I can raise you to six or seven if I choose, and if you are disposed to be nice and sociable with me I will. Come, is it a bargain?"

"Oh, I can't do it," returned Myrtle, realizing how much in his power she was, "Mrs. Cassidy wouldn't let me."

"Oh to Halifax with Mrs. Cassidy," he rejoined insolently, "I'll get theatre tickets for the whole Cassidy family some night and then see what she says. You won't be able to use her for an excuse after she accepts my treat." And then as they had reached the border of the poor section where M street was and realizing it was unwise to coax this timid girl any more just now, he bade her good-night and turned back. And poor Myrtle conscious as never before how helpless a salesgirl in a store was, hurried home.

But when she confided her dilemma to Agnes, as she soon did, that girl's blue eyes sparkled with droll Irish wit. "Don't ye worry, darlin'," she said, "we'll fix the impedant toad. Jist tell him ye'll go to supper wid him and the show but ye think so much o' me I'm to be fetched along. The two of us can kape him behavin'. If that don't go, tell him you're soon to be axin' to come into me church an' must confess to the praste. Them spalpeens has no use for girls who has to confess. That'll sthump him."

"But suppose I lose my place in the store?"

"Oh, don't worry 'bout that, darlin'," returned Agnes buoyantly, "if ye do jist go to the manager ye first did an' tell him the whole business. He'll give ye another place. And if ye lose yer job yer face is good for another aisy enough."

And then Myrtle felt more courageous.

But her pursuer had no intention of wasting a few of his precious dollars in entertaining a second girl he didn't want around and although he assented to Myrtle's ultimatum after his next theatre proposal the invitation was not forthcoming. Then conscious that this firm if timid girl must be managed otherwise he tried another method and a week later she found her pay envelope held six instead of five dollars.

"You noticed, my dear," he said to her next morning with assumed tenderness, "that I've given you a raise without asking, in spite of your being so offish. I could make it ten if you were good to me," and then he leered at her in a way that made her blush.

"I am thankful for the extra pay, I need it," returned Myrtle turning away to her work.

"And will you go to supper with me now?" he rejoined anxiously.

"No thank you," she answered curtly, "not unless Agnes goes with us."

And that night soon after she left the store whom should she meet but Cindy!

For a moment these two, wide apart as vice and virtue could make them, stared at one another, then the tie of schoolmate friendship asserted itself and they came together in quick embrace.

"Why Mert," exclaimed the rotund, well-dressed one, "I'm so glad to see you! What brought you here? Come," she added, locking arms with Myrtle after the kiss and to escape the jostling crowd, "let's get out of this mob," and drawing Myrtle into a passage way she surveyed her again. "You are good for sore eyes," she continued, "but how came you here?"

"Oh, I ran away," responded Myrtle forgetting all else in her joy at meeting this, her only friend at Folly Island.

"And came here?"

"No, not at first. I got work in a hotel and came here a month ago."

"And what are you doing and how much for it?" with a survey of Myrtle's plain merino dress and brown cloth jacket.

"I'm at 'The Emporium,' hosiery department," responded Myrtle also glancing at Cindy's handsome fall costume, rich furs and stunning hat, "I got four-fifty at first, then five, and now six dollars a week."

"And where do you room?"

"M Street with a Mrs. Cassidy," responded Myrtle, conscious as never before how poor a locality that was.

"M Street!" exclaimed the astonished Cindy. "How came you to go there? That's in poverty hollow where rag alley is!"

"I know it," returned Myrtle, penitently, "but I can't afford a room where it costs more, and those are good honest people."

"Well, I'm just as glad to see you," Cindy declared again embracing and kissing Myrtle, "I wish I could take you to supper and theatre with me this eve but I can't. I've got a date with my best crush—'Old Got-Rocks' I call him. I'll come round to-morrow before closing time, take you to supper and to my rooms for a nice visit. No, I won't either," she continued hastily, "you're good and we will go to the theatre instead. We can talk just as well. I must go," she continued consulting a jewelled chatelaine watch beneath her furs, "or my mash will growl," and once more kissing Myrtle she was off.

And Myrtle, scarcely understanding how her old-time schoolmate and friend could have been transformed into this whirlwind of speech and stunning raiment within four months, turned her steps toward M Street, astonished, almost dazed. She knew that Cindy had had little regard for what people said at Sandy Bay, that she hated work in the canning shop — and with reason — that she left there to take a ready-at-hand position to be secured for her in this city by the young yachtsman, Frank Goodnow. But who was "Old Got-Rocks" and from whom the ermine furs, rich costume, and beautiful watch? Its true solution came to her bit by bit, however, and when she reached home shame kept her from confiding to her friends whom she had met. And the problem of self-support, the influences and example of those about her and life in a great city was growing more complex day by day.

Neither had she much except an intuitive self-respect to guide her. Her life at Folly Island had been a hard-worked child's one, Aunt Perth, her only moral mentor, with a few good books to furnish ideals and that was all. For the rest, all that was likely to save her from falling to Cindy's level was Norah's terse advice, and her own inborn virtue. To offset that now was the cold, cruel, ignoring glance Mark had given her.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CINDY ONCE MORE

A THEATRE with all its glamor of lights, well-garbed humanity, music and stage presentation of make-believe life was unknown to Myrtle. Never had she seen even Uncle Tom's Cabin — about the only show that ever reached Sandy Bay — and now Cindy's invitation warmed her with a glow of expectancy. She had one best dress — the gift of Mrs. Davis — she donned it next morning for this new and unexpected treat, a few additions were purchased that day and when Cindy called for her Myrtle felt she was at least respectably dressed. And yet the contrast between her and Cindy's rich and conspicuous raiment was striking. The latter created a buzz of comment among the other salesgirls near Myrtle. Parsons eyed her with curious interest for he knew her social status and made a mental note of how he would use it to humble the proud Myrtle later on.

"We will have supper first," Cindy asserted as soon as the two left the store and well versed as she was in the city's possibilities she now led her to a café composed of private dining rooms and into one of them.

"Have a drink, Mert?" she next queried after they had laid aside their hats and were seated at the one small table.

"No, I thank you," responded Myrtle firmly, "I never tasted spirits in my life."

"Well, you better, it'll chirk you up," Cindy declared smiling, "you look scared. Two cocktails, please," she added addressing the colored waiter who had followed them in. He vanished and then she picked up the bill of fare.

"Now, Mert," she said cheerfully as one accustomed to good living, "what will you eat? Let's have a couple of broiled lobsters to remind us of Folly Island and how lucky we are to be away from it. Or would you prefer a bird?"

"You order the supper, please," Myrtle returned timidly, "I am satisfied with anything."

"Well I ain't," Cindy asserted briskly, "I live to eat and have a good time. Two broiled lives," she added to the waiter who had returned with the drinks, "and a pair of quail on the side with all the fixin's. Also grape fruit with sherry first and a pot of coffee.

"There, that will beat M Street grub, I guess," she continued reaching for her cocktail, “and now, Mert, let's drink to our escape.”

Myrtle perforce barely touched her lips to the other red mixture while Cindy swallowed hers with a smack. “Now,” she said, “tell me your story and how did you dare come here?”

But somehow Cindy's manner, her free and easy ordering of drinks, her previous reference to “Old Got-Rocks” and Myrtle's surmises in this connection now told her she had best not be too confiding.

“Well,” she answered cautiously, “I ran away from Folly Island, as I told you, to find some better work and earn a living. I did table-work in a nice hotel — I wish I was back there now,— then I came here because another table-girl I'd made friends with, was leaving and she said I could do better in a store.”

“And have you?” asked Cindy, glancing Myrtle over.

“No, I haven't earned my board and room rent so far,” she returned sighing, “and if I hadn't saved a little money at the hotel I'd be in debt now.”

“I believe that part easy enough,” Cindy answered watching Myrtle's face, “but why don't you tell the rest? How about Frank's friend, Mason I think his name was, who was after you on the island? Where does he come in?”

And then poor Myrtle grew crimson.

" I — I — don't know what you mean," she stammered — then more defiantly —" I've nothing else to tell, Cindy."

" Well, don't, my dear old friend," returned Cindy tenderly. " But I am awful sorry for you, honest I am! I can read your story without another word, or part of it. You met and fell in love with this fellow Mason, he gave you money to run away with — else you'd never dared — he was to meet you at this hotel and didn't, and then you came here to find him. Now you haven't or else he's ignored you and that's why I'm sorry for you. This city's no place for a girl like you who means to be good," she continued cynically, " you haven't any trade or education fit to earn anything but shop girl's wages, and — excuse me I don't want to discourage you — but if you keep on being good you will go broke and barefoot both."

" I guess so," answered Myrtle sighing, " but I feel just as I did when we parted at Sandy Bay last summer. I *won't* take money from men the way you — you think I ought to."

" No, my dear Mert, I know you won't," answered Cindy also sighing, " and may be you are right. It's not money I'm proud of,— I know you know how I live — and you'd be utterly wretched. But it's an awful hard world for a good girl to earn an honest living in and ten times worse here." Then this contradictory girl, neither all good or all bad, closed her eyes in meditation.

"Mert," she continued suddenly looking up again after a lengthy pause and in tender tones: "You were my only friend at Sandy Bay, the only one who stuck by me in spite of all talk — most of it deserved, may be — and I don't forget it. I am your friend, too — shall be as long as I live. Neither do I want to pry into your heart affairs, but — you mustn't mind what I say now — I don't believe this fellow will ever marry you, you ain't educated right for him, and you've either got to go my way, to hell, I s'pose, or quit the city."

"I — I know it, I guess so," replied Myrtle incoherently, and biting her lips to keep back the tears, "but — but I've no place and no one to go to. I'm awfully alone, Cindy."

"There, there don't give way," cautioned Cindy jumping up and rushing to embrace and kiss her friend. "I knew I'd hurt you but I meant kind and I ain't going back on you — not yet. As long as I've got a dollar, half of it is yours, so cheer up and smile once more."

"And now," she added after a long sympathetic scrutiny of Myrtle, "let me take you in hand, do you a good turn and land you on Plush Avenue. This fellow, Mason, is in town for Frank saw him not long ago. He is also a bachelor and well fixed, he must like you some or he wouldn't have done what I'm sure he did, but you needn't expect he will marry you for he won't. What he will do I am positive is, take care of you if you are willing and you can guess the rest. Now say the word and I'll go to him to-morrow and in a week (if he is as wise as I think) you will have a furnished flat to live in like mine, all the new dresses you need and more, and money in your pocket. Don't say no till you think it over," she added hurriedly, "it's the way of life here for homeless girls like you and me, and for you to go on as you are, practically starving in rag alley, is a fool thing. Come, what do you say?"

For a moment Myrtle started at the audacious, smiling face, just across the table, while the full meaning of this shameless yet alluring proposition came to her. Then the degradation and ignominy of it all crimsoned her face and neck.

"Cindy," she said with a flash of defiance, "I was beaten and hated on Folly Island. I am what you once said, a nameless outcast not fit for a good man's wife, but I'll starve or die before I'll let you go to that man and offer to sell me; never, never, never!"

"Yes, I suppose so," returned Cindy in hopeless tone and for the first time feeling a tinge of shame. "And the more fool you, Mert. You may change your mind, though, after you have starved a spell longer. And what will you gain by it?" she added, unwilling to give up her plan. "Nobody knows you here or cares a rap what becomes of you. You will never get credit for being good, even if you are. There isn't one girl in five in your store any better than I am, only they are more sly about it, and as for the men in this city — well they are all alike and as fast as they can afford to be. Some even more so, and on other people's money, Old Got-Rocks says, and he knows. Then the way-up women, the fine ladies, ain't much better, as you can find out if you read the divorce court reports. No Mert," she asserted, after a pause to let these cynical arguments take effect, "goodness here is out of date and old-fashioned except among a few ancient tabbies or male fossils who have to be good. As for the rest, it's have all the fun you can, for, as Frank says, when you are dead you are a long time dead."

The waiter's knock and entry, with their supper now ended this peculiar discussion for the time and not until the feast was disposed of was it referred to again by Cindy. "Now, Mert," she continued, nonchalantly lighting a cigarette, "you have got some foolish notions in your mind and where they come from is one too many for me. Certainly not from Folly Island."

"Yes they did," interrupted Myrtle, "from some books I read there and Mr.—I mean some other way."

"Oh ho, it's a man's preaching, is it!" laughed Cindy. "Why didn't you say Mr. Mason, and done with it? Men always talk that way to a girl they want for themselves — I know 'em, the hypocrites! And yet they'll buy any girl they can that tries to be good like you. I'll bet a bottle of wine your friend Mason is no better and at this very moment is with some fairy who is working him."

And then the vision of Mark escorting a well-gowned lady to the theatre so recently and his cold stare at her returned to Myrtle on the instant like a knife thrust and to clinch these assertions.

"Why, what's struck you?" Cindy ejaculated the next moment, eyeing her sharply, "You look pale as a ghost.

"I know, dear," she added more tenderly, "it's him, it's always a 'him' with a girl who has a heart

— more's the pity. I'm sorry I said what I did, though," she continued after a pause, "forget it. And if only you'd let me go to him now you'd be the happiest girl in the city. Please say the word, Mert?" Then to add the one most persuasive plea of all she arose, stepped around to Myrtle, stooped and kissed her.

There are moments in the lives of all when — unknown to them they stand on the brink of an abyss or halt to choose between an upward or downward path. Such a moment now came to poor heart-hungry, almost desperate Myrtle. On one hand was the man she loved and all it meant to her. On the other, only this continued pinching, hopeless life of denial and M Street. To let Cindy go to him was shame, dishonor, degradation, with perhaps a simulated love and protection to gild it. Still to refuse meant soul and body starvation. Only a moment she hesitated while her heart leaped and pulses thrilled with insidious allurement, then the heroism of her soul rose supreme and swallowing a sob she shook her head.

"No, no Cindy, I can't," she said, "I can't."

And somehow just then Cindy felt herself a shameless and ignoble creature.

"So be it," she returned slowly, "I shall never ask you again. But you are braver than I could be. Now let's go to the show," she added hastily, glad to so end the matter.

But the theatre they soon entered with its sea of faces, its dazzling array of handsomely gowned ladies, their sparkling diamonds, men in evening costume, and orchestra's languorous waltz overture, now opened a new world to Myrtle. And when the curtain rose and the play began, she quite forgot her many troubles in following that make-believe episode of human life. She laughed at the bits of comedy, felt her heart respond to the heroine's sorrows, worried lest the villain should fail to get his deserts, and was dead to the world and all in it until the curtain fell on everybody happy.

Once outside and dazed still she felt herself drawn aside from the outgoing rush and Cindy spoke.

"I'm never going to take you to my rooms, Mert," she said hurriedly —"not now. And I want you to forget what I said and what I am and think of me only as your old friend at Sandy Bay. I shall come into the store now and then; I shan't forget you, never fear, and some evening we will repeat this one again." Then crowding a bit of paper into Myrtle's hand she beckoned a hackman, almost pushed Myrtle into the carriage, handed the driver a dollar, bade him take his passenger to M Street and with a "Good night, dear," to Myrtle joined the hurrying away stream of people.

When Myrtle stopped to examine the bit of paper by the next street light she found it was a ten-dollar bill.

And that night she tossed and turned on her pillow for hours, living over the evening's charm again and again, then returning to the bare facts of her own situation and future as outlined by Cindy. And the more she dwelt upon them the more hopeless they seemed.

Then Mark's face intruded itself; first with the tender brown eyes, and kind words spoken beside her dear old playhouse; all his manly interest and honest advice, and following these like an avenging spectre, that cold blank stare so recently given her by him. And the oftener that returned the more wretched she grew! Also the more positive that she must seek a livelihood somewhere away from this city, this great hive of evil-minded men and designing women — as described by Agnes — or else — and then she shuddered, for now another of the city's sights recurred to her. She had, going home one evening with Agnes — and a cold, rainy one — seen a woman, young and yet old, with a pinched, haggard, painted face, scanty yellow hair, and poor raiment; step out of an alley just ahead of them and seize the arm of a passing man. Only two words of what was exchanged between these and that "I'm starving" reached Myrtle as they neared them, and then Agnes — wise in city's ways — explained who the bedraggled, painted creature was and her calling.

And now that woman's face, hideous, hopeless, leering; her dirty ragged clothing and words of desperation, returned to Myrtle. Also the almost as hopeless admission made by Cindy.

And was this what her friend had meant? Was this the outcome and end of such a life as Cindy was leading? Surely it must be, and her future here seemed all the more desperate.

And then her experiences at Conway Hollow with the two drummers who tried their blandishments on her, the score or more of men who had accosted her on the street here, and her employer, Parsons, with his persistent pursuit, now returned to her. "Oh, why must men be so base and designing?" she thought. Why so different from the noble, generous and tender ones in books she had read? They never insulted helpless table-girls or followed poorly paid shop-girls with evil intent. They were always manly, thoughtful, chivalrous, and pure-minded. And once more Cindy's prosperity, her thriving on the money of "Old Got-Rocks" and free use of it — also of others no doubt — again recurred to poor

Myrtle. She could not, would not so exist! She would beg or starve first, and then Cindy's assertions about "going broke and barefoot both" followed as a matter of course, and brought Myrtle's present situation home to her in forceful manner.

She had come to this city with about forty dollars of her own money. A hat, winter jacket, and a few other absolutely needed articles had reduced that to less than twenty, her present wages barely sufficed for board, washing, and room rent, and what if she should lose her position or be taken sick? And where else could she go or what else could she do? Cindy had told her bitter truths, she was not fit for a man like Mark, had no education to enable her to earn aught but servant or shop-girl wages, and all hope that he would ever find her or ever try to was gone.

Truly the future of her life was dark, desperate and without a rift of light!

CHAPTER XXXIV

A WOULD-BE LECOQ

"The Emporium" was managed and run on cold, strictly selfish principles. To buy everything at the lowest possible cash price was the first; to buy much merchandise of second-grade or inferior quality and advertise it as "clearance sales," "mill-end sales," or "three-hour sales" was the next; — and they always succeeded in fooling the public. Its chief manager was instructed to hire girls in place of men, because cheaper, all assistant managers — Parsons was one — were directed to cut their wages whenever an excuse could be found, to exact fines for trifling faults, and in all ways treat them as so many slaves whose lives and morals must subserve small pay and cut prices.

As this was the shibboleth, the law and gospel of the firm, it is not surprising that "Artie" had full scope for his ambitions.

He was also what some one aptly termed "a tin horn sport," i. e. a foolish braggart. He was cheek-by-jowl with gamblers, bucket-shop men, pool-room keepers, and the like, whenever he had time; was always telling how he was long or short of any stock that had had a rise or fall — yet never risked a dollar for he had none to risk — always asserted that he had won various sums on this horse or that, and yet his landlady had hard work to obtain her pay and his tailor was forever dunning him. Beyond these foolish assertions that deceived none who knew him, he imagined himself to be a wonderfully keen observer of men and women and their ways. A modern Lecoq in fact, who could tell a man's business by his walk or a woman's status by the shade of her hair or glance of her eyes. He had read a score of detective stories, his favorites always — and desired to emulate their heroes. To this end he spied upon everybody whom he could day or night, watched theatres to see if perchance some man he knew was escorting a lady not his wife, and if so, who she was. He looked into cafes, gambling houses, sporting resorts for the same sinister purpose, and watched the bucket-shops as well. He even visited worse resorts to pick up vile facts and information he might be able to use sometime. He had as stated tried his preliminary arts on Myrtle, that is, to induce her to take the first steps in a downward career, but without avail. He had also, and for the same ultimate object, watched for and waylaid her on her lone walk home several evenings to coax and tease her to sup with him, but without success. He did not despair, however. A waiting and watching game had won out before with him; it would again, he was sure, so he kept at it and each evening either followed her part way in a casual manner or posted himself at some vantage point to see if another man was walking home with her. And so doing one evening he saw her meeting with Cindy — whose social position he knew full well — watched them enter a well-known café, hung around till they came out, followed and observed them go into a theatre and was even witness to their peculiar parting. And then his base soul was filled with unholy glee for now he saw a coveted chance. To add force and to complicate matters, the very next day Cindy presented herself at the hosiery counter while Myrtle was absent a few moments.

"Where is Miss Baldwin — Myrtle?" she demanded of another salesgirl.

"There is no Miss Baldwin here, lady," the girl answered meekly.

"Why, yes there is," Cindy asserted imperiously, "for I've seen her here, she is my friend."

"Who is it you wish to see, lady?" interrupted Parsons in a suave manner as he stepped up to Cindy.

"Why, my friend Miss Baldwin," she answered brusquely, "there she is now," she added as Myrtle drew near and advanced to meet her. She purchased a half-dozen pair of the finest silk hose, chatted a few moments with Myrtle and then left the store.

And that evening Parsons, now armed and equipped as he had never hoped to be, stepped boldly up beside Myrtle soon after she left the store and thus accosted her:

"I'm sure, Miss Baldwin," he said with easy assurance, "you will now be glad of my company home, or better still, let's have supper and go to the show. It seems to me you'd best do it now. What say you?"

For a moment Myrtle, conscious her real name had been betrayed by Cindy, was speechless from sudden fear and shame, then the utter meanness, the vileness of this fellow's speech and action flashed over her and gave her courage.

"I don't care to go to supper or theatre with you, sir," she answered sharply, "and I never shall, so you needn't ask me again."

"Well, I notice you ain't so very particular in picking your company," he sneered, "so long as its one of your own sex, and I guess my name is full as good as the lady friend you were with the other evening. How long have you been chums with her?"

"That is none of your business, sir," returned Myrtle hotly, "she is an old schoolmate of mine I met the evening you spied upon me."

"There, now don't get mad, my dear, and be sassy," he responded, soothingly, "and don't be silly any longer. I'm struck on you, as I've told you; I can be your friend and raise your wages when I choose, and will if you are nice to me, so let's make up and have a good time. And, by the way, if I raise you to say eight a week for your good looks, you needn't room in that vile M Street any longer. Come let's be friends."

It was an open, bare, bald, shameless offer for Myrtle to sell herself for a paltry two dollars a week; she knew it on the instant, and it made her blood boil.

"No sir, I don't want any better pay or any such offer, I wouldn't go out with you if I starved for it," she returned angry all over, "and you needn't insult me again, either!"

But Parsons like most of his ilk was impervious to any woman's just anger. He was like a serpent to crawl and hiss and strike unawares, or a cowardly, sneaking man willing to be spat upon so long as he gained his object.

"Well, well, keep cool my dear Iva, or Myrtle, which is it?" he answered with covert sneer. "I haven't insulted you, I've only tried to be friendly and now tell me, is Iva the name you work under and Myrtle your sporting one or how is it? Maybe I'd best tell the bosses you trot double and chum with a —"

But Myrtle waited not to hear the last of his words for on the instant she darted across the street, ran down another and vanished. And that night, and wisely too, she held council with her three friends.

"He's a bad man, a dhirty dog, so he is," declared Mrs. Cassidy, "an' be the howly mither I'd loike to souse him wid soap-suds so I wud!"

"I'd go to the bosses," added the more world-wise Agnes, "an' tell thim he offered to raise yer wages if ye'd sin wid him. They're so close-fisted, begorry they'd give him the bounce, an' mebbe a better job for you. I'd thry it onyhow!"

"An' so wud I," put in Mary Ann, who was freckled and red-haired, "shure you're good-lookin' enough to git a job anywhere an' if ye don't I'll git ye one in the box shop. It's dhirty work but they pay sivin a week."

And thus encouraged Myrtle went direct to the little old, alert man, the general manager next morning.

"I am Iva Stone, and have been in your hosiery department," she said at once to him, "and please I'd like another place, sir."

Once more this keen eyed Power wheeled around from his desk and flashed a sharp glance at Myrtle.

"What for?" he demanded.

"I can't get along with Mr. Parsons," she answered, as directly, "he has insulted me."

"How so, what did he do?"

"He tags me going home every night and wants me to go to supper with him and — and that isn't all," admitted Myrtle, now coloring, "he offered to raise my pay if I would."

"Nonsense, he don't raise anybody's pay," asserted this little man whose name was Hill. "I do that solely on his report. He said you were doing well, were about to leave so I gave you an extra dollar last week to keep you."

And then more light upon "The Emporium" management dawned on Myrtle.

"But couldn't he discharge me if he wished?" she queried anxiously, "if he didn't like me?"

"Not unless there was a business reason," assured Mr. Hill, "his own likes and dislikes have no weight with me. As for his making love to you it's his affair and yours only. As you are a good-looker you must expect it. Most girls do," and then he turned to his desk to end the interview.

Myrtle also returned to her duties forthwith, somewhat assured, and from that time onward never looked at Parsons or addressed a word to him unless forced to do so. And even those were cold and cutting. Neither did the general manager call Parsons to account (which was fortunate for Myrtle) for hers was an old story at "The Emporium," and of scant interest to the firm. They were not running a school for moral instruction — just a plain money-making hive where human souls and bodies, vice or virtue were of no more account than the coal shovelled under their basement boilers. Neither did poor, unsophisticated Myrtle realize or even guess to what extent this fellow Parsons would go in his pursuit of her or how low he would stoop.

She found out in due time, however.

A few days later, or the week before Christmas, in fact, Cindy rushed into the store again just before closing time.

"I've only a moment, Mert," she said, "but I want you to meet me in just an hour at the Café for supper and theatre. That'll give you time to go home and dress up, or come as you are. I've a lot to tell you," and away she sped without waiting for an answer.

And Myrtle, equally anxious to see her, almost ran home to put on her one best dress and be back in time. She was, and ten minutes ahead, to find Cindy awaiting her. Then of course they went to one of the cozy little supper rooms where Cindy at once blurted out her all-important news.

"I'm going away, Mert," she said, elated, "on a big steam yacht to Florida. Be gone a month! Ain't it grand? And there is quite a party. Frank, Old Got-Rocks, of course it's his boat, and two other men with four other ladies, one an aunt of somebody, make-believe you know, to take the curse off. I hate to leave you, Mert," she added hastily, "but it's what I've dreamed of all my life and I must."

"I'm awful sorry," Myrtle answered swallowing a rising lump, "I shall miss you, for somehow you being here makes me feel I have one friend I could go to in trouble."

"Of course, but it won't be long"— buoyantly, —"and now how are you fixed for money, Mert?"

"I've got fifteen dollars of my own and the ten you so kindly gave me. Its enough anyway unless I get sick or lose my place. I came near it last week and may have to leave the 'Emporium' as it is."

"Why so," demanded Cindy, "what's up?"

"Well, I might as well tell you," responded Myrtle coloring and hesitating. "I — I was so afraid my grandfather would follow me when I left Folly

Island, I took another name, Iva Stone, and have used it ever since. You called for me by my own name and it gave me away. The manager twitted me of it, and — and said things about you and me that — that I wish he hadn't. He's been pestering me too, but I hate him."

"Yes, I know what he said," returned Cindy, sighing, "but it can't be helped. I'm it, I know, only I'm awful sorry you had to hear me called that name. Why didn't you tell me about your assuming another one?"

"I hated to, and I didn't think how you might use my right one."

"Does he, Mr. Mason, know you changed it?" queried Cindy, eyeing her companion curiously.

"Ye-s," stammered Myrtle blushing, "he — he advised it."

And now the astute, world-wise, half-bad, but kind-hearted Cindy, smiled, while a tender look softened her eyes. "Myrtle Baldwin," she said with mock severity, "now I've read your whole story and believe this man Mason loves you. I know you do him, and you are a fool to go on this way any longer. To-morrow I'm going to tell him you are here!"

"No, you won't," returned Myrtle defiantly, "not if you are my friend! He knows I am here. I met him face to face and he never even bowed, just stared at me one moment and kept on."

Then Cindy pursed her full red lips and gave a prolonged whistle.

"The brute," she exclaimed, "the contemptible, cowardly brute! And now that you've given me the key to your love-story, my poor Mert," she added, "trust me with the rest. I swear to God I'll never betray you."

And then poor Myrtle, soul-sick, and deserted as she believed herself to be, hungering for a little sympathy in her heart sorrows, put aside her promise to Mark never to betray his aid and interest, and for the first time told her story in full.

And no one should blame her!

It opened Cindy's eyes to what honest love and loyalty could mean — at least they were brimming with tears at its close, and then she gathered Myrtle in her arms and kissed her once, twice, thrice.

"You dear old splendid," she said at the conclusion of this heart burst, "I'd give ten years of my life to care for a man like that and I won't believe he meant to cut you, either. I don't think he knew you at all. Where and when did you meet him?"

Then Myrtle related in minute detail just how and where she saw Mark, that night.

"He never saw you to know you," again asserted Cindy, "of that I am positive. Men are fickle and selfish. They can and will make believe love to several women at once, and as for being faithful to one, its impossible for them. But that fellow Mason honestly cared for you or he wouldn't have given you money — loaned it as you say — and not made free with you as an offset. That's a man's nature always towards a woman, to get his pay. It may be, too, he dared not know you when with another and you dressed as poor as you was."

"Then he didn't care for me!" interrupted Myrtle spiritedly. "He must have known I couldn't be dressed nice unless I was —"

"Unless you was doing as I am," smiled Cindy intercepting her thought, "and all the more reason why he would have noticed you had he recognized you. I have still another reason for my belief it's all a mistake," she added hurriedly, "Frank says Mason is a woman-hater or he isn't after them at all. Yet from your story he was after you pretty steady on the island. I tell you, Mert, that man cared for you, and now for God's sake let me go to him! I won't even let on you are here until I am sure how he feels and I can soon tell. I can read men like a book, in no time." Then this self-contained, almost imperious Cindy who in six months had bloomed from an ill-clad illiterate girl earning scanty wages in a canning factory into a richly garbed woman of the town, wearing ermine furs and diamonds, and a keen cynic as well, smiled serenely. "Trust me, dear," she continued, "I know how to handle a man, to pump him if need be and he won't even suspect why I called on him. I want to do you a good turn, and please let me, Mert?"

But Myrtle despite her heart-hunger once more shook her head. "No, no, I won't let you go to him," she responded slowly as if renouncing an offer of heaven, "I can't, I can't! He would suspect and I should despise myself all my life! And he may care for the woman he was with, for all you know? No, you sha'n't go to him!"

Then Cindy looked at her with admiring, misty eyes. "My dear," she said tenderly, "I love you, but you are a fool! Still I wish I had your pride. It's heroic. When I get back I shall make it my way to meet that man somehow for a purpose not my own. In the meantime you may change your mind. Love will conquer a good deal of pride in time. Now let's go to the show and forget our troubles. This is the last evening I can have with you till I'm back from Florida."

Then this girl of strangely contrasting moods and morals with some gold in the alloy, led the way to a near-by theatre.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE DEPTHS OF AN EVIL NATURE

When a man — no an ape — of Parson's character is thwarted in his pursuit of a woman, an ignoble revenge is all that occurs to him and this to soothe and salve his wounded vanity. And now this hyena in male raiment followed the same course. He knew his case was now hopeless with Myrtle, but he could still annoy, humiliate, and shame her in countless ways and he set about it with fiendish cunning. His first move was to traduce her with the other girls in his department. To this end he concocted and whispered an abominable story to account for her being in the store under an assumed name. It was a truly ingenious, vile libel, well calculated to make her despicable in the eyes of the other salesgirls. To that he also added his own insolent, almost brutal treatment, never bade her good-morning, or said good-night, called her to account sharply whenever she failed to make a sale, used "stupid" and "fool" in this connection, disarranged her stock occasionally during her noon absence and berated her for it; and in numerous other ways made her miserable. Then he informed first one and then another young department manager that she could be easily picked up on the street and set them after her. She soon became conscious of his sudden change even from the first day, knew the reason for it as well, but proud as she was made no protest. Once only she tried for a little sympathy from one whose position was next to her, to receive a shrug of this girl's shoulders and the chilly information that she "had troubles of her own."

Then the continual accostings on her way home from first one and then another of men she had seen in the store first amazed her, then opened her eyes to its meaning. She confided all this to the Cassidy girls of course, but they were powerless to aid her.

"It's a burnin' shame, shure it is," said Agnes, "but I'd sthop thim fellys from thrying' to pick me up on the strate, so I wud."

"How, please tell me?" Myrtle queried anxiously.

"Aisy enough," returned Agnes, "jist take a little pepper along wid ye an' whin one spakes to ye trow it in his face. He'll kape away after that."

"That wudn't do," interrupted her mother, "she'd git arristed, so she wud, an' the felly'd lie out uv it."

"I can't onderstand why God do be lettin' such bastes live in this wurrld," added Agnes, "for all they do is harrm. Jist livin' an' thryin' their bist to ruin girls an' sind their sowls to Purgatory. Thin they hov sich palaverin ways wid 'em, all lies, an' they smoile so swate an' promise iv'rything!

"Most bad min do be good-lookers, too," she continued reflectively, "an' girls will chase 'em like fools. Shure I've watched 'em in the sthore many a toime wid Parsons an' all he had to do was tip 'em a smoile an' they acted loike they was ready to fall on his neck, the sillys! As Father Moony says, 'The divil lives in a handsome man so he can catch sowls.'"

How much shame and humiliation this cur Parsons was able to and did mete out to Myrtle during the week or more she stood it, no girl, unless so situated, can realize. She just felt she had to, that was all, or give up her position and perhaps fail to find another. Neither did the box shop, where Mary Ann worked, prove a haven in this extremity, for that was to be closed for inventory and repairs during the first two weeks of the new year, the winter months were dull ones in that line and no more help needed, as she was told, and so poor Myrtle was face to face with the always hard problem of a livelihood. She even went without her "five cints for iverything" dinner several times to apply for a place in other stores, but without avail. It was always the same answer, "Dull season coming, no help wanted."

And meanwhile Parsons kept up his persecution. He knew — the contemptible cur — that even Myrtle's proud spirit could not stand this forever, or so he considered, and that rather than lose her place, or be driven from it, she would yield and accept his favor. He had kept watch of her movements, knew she had applied for other positions, checkmated her chances in two stores whose head managers he knew, by insinuating that she was a thief and soon to be discharged from "The Emporium." He had even gone to M Street, made cautious inquiries about the Cassidy family, found out where Agnes now worked and sleuthlike, investigated the box shop's prospects, or liability to need more help. And then a few days before Christmas he waylaid Myrtle once more. This time it was well away from the crowded thoroughfares and on a side street to which he had followed her.

"Hold on, my dear," he said insolently as he came up to her, "and don't walk so fast. I've been trying to catch you for ten minutes and not run."

"I'm in a hurry, sir, and can't stop," returned Myrtle glancing at him like a scared deer.

"Well, you better," he responded bluntly, "I've something to tell you."

But she kept on.

"We are going to fire a few girls after Christmas," he continued coming to the point at once, "and it's up to me to say who in my department. Now you have been sassy to me, you are not popular with the other girls on account of some things I know, and now it's — well be nice to me, or lose your job. And you won't find another before spring anyhow!"

There was no politeness about this barefaced proposal or even decency — just a plain order, vile beyond words.

"You'd better come off your perch, my pretty maid," he continued without waiting for her to speak. "There's a long cold winter ahead of you and the Cassidy family won't board you for nothing. Then your gay and festive friend has lit out, I'm the only one who can help you, so come now, don't be a fool any longer."

But Myrtle, white with suppressed anger now and longing to strike this insulting fellow full in the face, made no answer for the sole reason that a week's wages would be due her in two days and she must have it. Neither was any needed, for now she knew the end of her service at "The Emporium" had come. All she did was to bite her lips to keep down her boiling wrath, then flashed one look of mortal hatred at the cur beside her, hissed "You brute!" and darted onward as she never ran before.

And Parsons sneaked back half conscious that he was one after all.

Neither did he get the chance to "fire" Myrtle as he intended, for when Saturday evening and her pay envelope came she walked out of "The Emporium" vowing never to enter it again. Nor did she.

But now she was face to face with an almost desperate situation. No friends who could aid her, no work or wages or place where she could hope to find any, Cindy gone and her sole belongings a cheap trunk, one best dress and two well-worn ones and nine dollars in money! It was not possible to be much worse off, she now thought, and yet it was, as she in due time found out. There was another possession she did not count on and now would not use to save her life even, the one hundred dollars that belonged to Mark. It had been treasured sacredly since she left Conway Hollow, it was now in a Barker House envelope at the bottom of her trunk and in her heart was the pathetic plan that if worst came to worst and she dying she would send it to him with a last message of love.

And now also she felt that that outcome might just as well end her loneliness, her heartache and all the shame of her birth.

But she was not quite ready to meet it, a faint hope that she yet might meet Mark once more on the city's street still cheered her; not to speak to him first — that she would never do now — only that he might see her. A poor, simple, pathetic, childish hope, akin to Folly Island and her playhouse.

She was here in a great city, had had her eyes opened to many of its dubious ways and evil influences, was heroic enough to face probable want, even utter destitution rather than sacrifice her soul and body, and yet she was still the idyllic child who had fed and talked to the sea gulls, worked weeks to build a stone playhouse and content to sit beside it watching the wide ocean while she forgot her slavery in day dreams! More than that, she was loyal enough to her only schoolmate friend, Cindy, to forgive her her evil life, and broad enough to see that beneath her love of fine raiment and lack of morals lay something of a better nature and the leaven of a tender heart.

The day before Christmas, however, found Myrtle more than despondent. She had spent the two previous ones in a fruitless quest for work, going into all sorts of stores and almost begging for any kind of employment. In some, crowded with shoppers now, a curt "no" was all the answer she obtained, one coarse man informed her that, "a good-looking gal like you no need to work, come round after we close up, I can give you a job," and in other stores the rush of customers allowed no chance for even a word of inquiry. She had tried business offices with no better results, she could neither write very well, she admitted, keep books, nor did she know aught of shorthand, or the use of a typewriter, and in one and all of the many stores and offices she visited, it seemed to her that employment was the one thing impossible to obtain. She could and did find brutal indifference, scorn almost, insinuated insult now and then, but work, the one most valued need in her life, not at all. And late that afternoon faint and weary — for to save the price she hadn't eaten a morsel since morning — she walked down Bank Street and halted in a dark alley entrance, just across from Number Forty-two! It was near closing time for offices but as the stores kept open evenings this week, the city was alight as usual in December, a rush of homeward-bound people crowded the sidewalks, and no one noticed the scantily clad girl watching the arched doorway just across. For a half-hour she stood there shivering yet hoping for the poor, pitiful consolation of seeing Mark's face. A weary, despondent pilgrim, waiting at the shrine of love! She did not want him to see her, felt sure he would not recognize her if he did, and meant to go away the instant she saw his face. A little touch of heart-hunger, childlike in its pathos!

But not even this reward was obtained for the excellent reason that Mark was out of the city, and after all outcomers from Forty-two had ceased, Myrtle chilled through now, stepped out from her vantage point.

And just then she found herself face to face with the dapper little fellow of red necktie and loud raiment who had tried his arts on her at Conway Hollow!

"Vy, Mish Stone," he exclaimed eagerly, "how vash you und ven did you leaf de Barker House? Pless me, but dis vash great luck," and he extended his hand. "Von't you shake hands mit me," he added as Myrtle ignored it, "you know I fell in luv mit you lasht summer und I don't forget you."

"I don't remember you, sir!" she answered in icy tones and stepping onward.

"But I know you do," rejoined this uncrushable drummer, "und now I vants to puy you somedings if you vill come mit me. I vill plow meinself if you do und a bottle of wine mit supper; I vill so help me!"

Then Conway Hollow and Norah's trick recurred to Myrtle on the instant almost bringing a smile to her sad face, yet she would not parley with this insolent fellow one moment.

"I wouldn't go to supper with you if I was starving," she responded in utter contempt, "you may get one of the Barker House table girls to meet you at the post office however, but I wouldn't wipe my shoes on you," and then she hurried on.

But even this scorn failed to check his persisting and not until he had pursued her up to the main street still entreating her to let him "puy somedings," did he desist from his efforts. And then once free from him Myrtle halted to look into a store window and collect herself as it were. She was faint from the all day fasting, chilled through by the half-hour of watching for Mark and utterly hopeless and despondent. Christmas eve or the day's observance had no meaning for her. She had heard of its gift-giving joys in a furtive way at Sandy Bay, but none at Folly Island, and now, watching the stream of joy-lit faces passing her, scores of people carrying bundles, and all animated by this Yule-tide interest; poor Myrtle felt more desolate and hopeless by contrast. And just then as if to accentuate her heartache, a richly clad lady and gentleman halted beside her to look into the store window.

"Oh, see that lovely set of furs, Hubby," the lady exclaimed, "and just what Iva needs this winter when she goes out! And there is the cunningest wrap for Doris too! Dear Hubby, I must add them to our collection of gifts!"

"Well, if you must, you must," 'dear Hubby' admitted benevolently, "I s'pose they'll need 'em later, anyway," and the two vanished into the store.

Some other Iva was to be made happy, Myrtle thought, feeling a new interest in her assumed name, and then — well for all this money-spending, gift-buying crowd cared she might starve! And more than ever now her future seemed utterly without hope.

But the spirit and animus of this the one most joyous holiday of all, Christmas, was now caught by Myrtle and despite her poverty and the outlook she bethought herself of her few friends and gifts for them. Not costly, for her purse contained less than four dollars, only that much she would spend for love of them. She did too, though pushed and jostled by the eager, buying crowd of late shoppers, and then with a knitted hood for Mrs. Cassidy, a handkerchief for Mary Ann, gloves for Agnes, and a pipe for Tim, and denying herself a car ride, Myrtle walked to M Street thankful that she even had this home for refuge.

But how long could she retain it, she now thought, entering and going direct to her room. These people barely existed as it was. Rent day and store bills absorbed all they collectively earned. Both girls were to be out of work soon for two weeks and perhaps longer, she could not and would not remain a burden on them and — she now had just six dollars and thirty cents!

But Mrs. Cassidy, hopeful soul that she was, met her smilingly when she descended to the kitchen. "What luck, darlin'," she asked cheerily, "did ye foind iver a place the day?"

"No," returned Myrtle despondently, "and I am about discouraged. No one wants me in this world, I guess."

"An' shure they do," that optimistic one answered, "your swate face'll foind ye a job soon enough, niver fear," and then Myrtle joined with her in the supper-getting. The two girls came in soon after, Tim, a stout lad of eighteen, a little later, the big bowl of steaming potato soup — mostly soup — was placed on the table and with "tay" and bread and butter, formed the meal. Later Mary Ann assaulted the ancient, out-of-tune piano, played a hit or miss accompaniment and sang "Wearing of the Green" and "Kathleen Mavourneen" with vigor, then rattled off a few dance tunes, and so the evening passed. When retiring time came both girls — conscious, perhaps, how Myrtle felt — kissed her with unusual tenderness, and yet neither Mrs. Cassidy's well-meant optimism or the honest affection of these girls served to ease her heartache one iota!

The next morning with its gift-exchanging episode — Myrtle received one from each of the girls — cheered her some, and then these three donned their very best and hurried away to attend church. In a way, also, Myrtle was now becoming a good Catholic — at least outwardly — for she had never once missed a church going with them since reaching Athens and felt herself the gainer by it. This time most of all, for the great Cathedral was packed full of young and old worshipers, the chancel and altars half hidden by foliage and flowers, the priests in white vestments repeated Latin rituals and prayers in solemn, awe-inspiring tones, and the joyous anthems of this Christmas Mass, made forceful by a hundred voices, was simply grand! At least it so seemed to Myrtle and lifted her above and beyond her own misfortunes and into another realm of feeling. Who this Great Redeemer, this wonderful Son of God, whose birth was now being celebrated was, however, appeared a trifle vague to her. She had, once only on Folly Island at midnight and in desperate mood, knelt and uttered a prayer to Some One — whom, she scarce knew — here she knelt with the rest but prayed not at all. And yet she felt that she ought to do so and that may be some unseen hand might be extended in aid if she did. She could read faces and moods, too, now, and those around her here seemed alight with some strange, occult joy, the source of which she failed to understand. In a way, however, she felt herself one with them, rejoicing at some great promise with them and elevated into another world by a mysterious, occult Something! Tears also came to her eyes unbidden, her sensitive soul vibrated in harmony with this mystic influence, to die now seemed a welcome escape from trouble and heart-hunger, and all in all, this quivering, pulsing, magic of sound and song produced an almost delirium of feeling.

It was not many hours ere she returned to earth, however, and to feel that all hope was vanishing.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CHRISTMAS AT GOOD WILL FARM

It had been Mark's custom since his graduation from Mr. Hinckley's aid to spend each Christmas at Good Will Farm and now as this one drew near he planned to do so again. There were new and unusual reasons for it this time which must be explained.

In the first place, Mark had fallen into a melancholy frame of mind, as he was perfectly conscious. His hopeless quest of Myrtle; all the months of waiting for an answer to his ads, his finding of her mother instead, his rush to Conway Hollow to meet bitter disappointment, his almost ludicrous pursuit of this Norah Cassidy also failing, and lastly his final visit to Folly Island — most depressing of all — each and collectively served to discourage him. He had never been in love before. He now had a mature case of that malady that came much as a man would fall over a wheelbarrow; to thump him a few times after he was down. In this case the heart-blows came hardest after he found the object of that organ's needs was apparently lost forever.

Then her mother's abject penitence and anxiety also affected him. She was so trustful yet wise, so confiding and tender, so like Myrtle in fact, his heart went out to her with filial love. He had also visited Glendale and her home once to be present at the marriage of her foster-daughter, and find the son old enough to care for himself. Also that Mrs. Upson could leave here any time she choose and accept a home where it best suited her to do so.

She had been his guest at The Elms, escorted to theatres a few times — one a most unfortunate time — and their future relations thus made possible. But the one now vital link, Myrtle, was lacking and as he oft said to himself with many an unbidden sigh, "God only knows where she is."

In a way, too, these months of futile pursuit, the constant hoping, watching, waiting, the letters he had written, the every-day scanning of faces wherever he went, was slowly but surely making a misanthrope of him. No business interest held his attention for long, money-making became a secondary matter, his club no longer attracted him, friends bored him, and the brightest comedy failed to bring a smile to his face, for all the time he felt that, somewhere in this busy world the tender, pathetic, odd little waif who had trusted him like a child was fighting for existence — or perhaps dead.

And then would come a heart-pang; keen, incisive, and ruinous to his peace of mind.

Her mother's future also became linked with his by the occult tie of mutual interest. Once a week they exchanged letters, his beginning "My dear Mother," and in a way she began to fill the maternal void in his past life and become one he could trust and confide in. For these reasons and because Good Will Farm had always seemed home to him and Mr. Hinckley a father, he not only wanted to pass this Yuletide there but have Mrs. Upson as well. Mr. Hinckley seconded this wish with a cordial invitation to her, and the very afternoon poor Myrtle watched for him so hopeless and despondent he and her mother met at B —— Junction and proceeded to Good Will Farm.

Mr. and Mrs. Hinckley met them at the little station of Hinckley, introductions and greetings followed, and then all four with a small retinue of Good Will boys hastened away over the snow clad road to a home of content. There seemed to be many of them all about, for it was evening now and cheering lights from a score of windows smiled a welcome. Even Good Will's little Gothic church added one for it was alight as they passed it and from within came the sound of young voices singing in chorus, a "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men" anthem.

Warm rooms, cordial interest and supper came next. A few of Mr. Hinckley's co-workers dropped in later to meet these arrivals, conversation and a general resumé of Good Will's hopes and attainments from its master spirit followed, but not until the callers departed was aught said of pertinent relation to this narrative and then from Mr. Hinckley:

"Well, Mark my boy," he then asked in his direct way, "how does the world go with you and have you found your sweetheart yet?"

"No," returned Mark, his face growing gloomy, "and what is worse I fear I never shall. I thought I'd got track of her once but failed. I begin to think I never can find her."

"Oh yes, you will," declared his host, beginning a noiseless tattoo of fingers on the arms of his chair, as was his wont when speaking. "In your last letter you said you had traced her to a Conway Hollow hotel, surely some one there must hear from her in time, or she may return to it another summer. Don't give up hope yet."

"Possibly," responded Mark, his face brightening, "I hadn't thought of that."

"Nor I," interrupted Mrs. Upson, "for if she has gone to a mill town with this Norah as I've imagined, they may both return to the Barker House next summer. But my heart will break before that time," she added with a sigh.

And then Mrs. Hinckley glanced at her curiously for her history now known seemed such a pitiful one.

"My heart goes out to you, Mrs. Upson," she interposed tenderly, "as only a mother's can. And I pray God you may not be kept waiting so long. Out of all the life tragedies I ever heard not one seems so pathetic as yours. And to know your child is alone in this great world, no one to watch over her, save her from evil pitfalls, it must be horrible."

"No one can understand how much so but myself," sighed Mrs. Upson, "for her life and situation is my constant reproach. Some days I feel I shall lose my reason from this dread suspense."

"But self-reproaches do no good, my dear woman," Mr. Hinckley interrupted, buoyantly, for he always saw the silver lining, "you still have your life to live, your spiritual work to do — I hope you have some — and retrospection is worse than useless. God has put us here to bear our burdens cheerfully, assume those of others who are weaker if we can, and so live and strive that to-day may be brighter for some one and to-morrow more hopeful. What mistakes and errors of judgment our youth is responsible for, do not concern to-day, Mrs. Upson, and unfit us for work." Then turning to Mark he added: "Have you been to Folly Island, my boy, since you were here and did you foreclose the mortgage?"

"Yes, I was there," Mark answered slowly, "but I didn't say much about my claim. Somehow Cap'n Jud wasn't in the mood to talk business. Not just glad to see me," and then he smiled.

"No, I presume not; no one ever wants to discuss a mortgage," laughed Mr. Hinckley, who had had youthful troubles of his own. "But how was he feeling, was he happy?"

"Not very, I imagine," Mark replied smiling again, "he has no pictures on the walls of his brain-cell except of devils may be."

"Then you do think he has a conscience after all," rejoined Mr. Hinckley, "from what you said I supposed otherwise."

"He has what is worse," returned Mark pointedly, "fear of ghosts. He believes Myrtle drowned herself and her shade is haunting him. I am glad of it." Then he related the visit Mrs. Upson and himself had paid to Folly Island and its outcome. After that, the one subject nearest his heart, his failure to find Myrtle was recurred to and his hunt for the elusive Norah described in full.

"I still believe your lost lady-love will be found in due time," asserted Mr. Hinckley encouragingly, when a pause came. "From your description, her dauntless courage in running away from Folly Island into an unknown world, almost, I am sure she is of unusual fibre and will never throw herself away. Such a spirit will find her employment and friends the world over, never fear."

"And may be a husband," interposed Mark ruefully, "then where do I come in?"

"Well you are left, that is all," laughed Mr. Hinckley, "but I don't foresee that. She practically confided herself to your keeping when she promised to meet you; no girl of her nature would do that unless love was the motive force, and she won't forget you easily. Some day, all in good time, she may walk into your office well-garbed and smiling."

"I'd like to witness the call," interjected Mrs. Hinckley, also smiling, "and yet it would be wrong to spoil such a *dénouement,* I'm sure."

And that Christmas eve passed so pleasantly in what seemed like home to Mark, with good cheer, encouraging words, and warm friends grouped about, lifted him into a more hopeful mood and made him feel almost sure he was to find Myrtle soon. Then somehow Mr. Hinckley's always buoyant optimism gave him an added confidence in Myrtle's good sense and assurance that she must have loved him, also and best of all, that her heroic self-reliance and courage would shield her from any harm. This again brought him to the belief that she would in the near future so gain in confidence that she would send some message to him — she knew where to find him, and why not? And so the inevitable result of one man's earnest faith now came about and Mark escaped a little of his melancholy mood.

The next day added more cheer, for the sun rose bright over the snow-clad, undulating fields of Good Will Farm, and this being the one best holiday of the year for its almost two hundred boys and girls, scores of them were already sliding, snowballing, and snow-scrubbing one another in a mad abandon of good spirits and happiness.

"We must show Mrs. Upson our little village and new library," Mr. Hinckley asserted, soon after breakfast, "also how our boys and girls live, work, play, and study. We have a regular division of work among them, a detail of so many each day to do certain things, so many hours for that and so many hours for study with interims for play and a little religious instruction. In summer the work-hours are longer for we raise everything eaten here, even our meats, and are a community by ourselves. We have our own simple by-laws, as it were; class gradations in school with an honor record to stimulate study, publish a newspaper of our own, the boys have two baseball clubs, two football teams, and the girls tennis and basket-ball teams. We have a gymnasium and swimming pool and even make most of our own clothing.

"To-day," he added, pausing for breath, "we have a vocal concert in our church, I shall make a few remarks, then our Christmas tree will be unveiled and Santa Claus will present each boy and girl some useful gift. I think," he continued, smiling, "there are thirty-four pairs of skates in the list, sixteen sleds, with warm gloves, mittens, caps, hoods, popcorn balls and candy by the bushel, for no one is forgotten."

The tour of Good Will consumed an hour,— and hurried at that — then Mark, Mrs. Upson and all the grown-ups of this colony gathered in the cozy Gothic church and after the briefest of prayers from Mr. Hinckley the forty or more young singers began their concert program. It was all new and interesting to Mrs. Upson — also heart-warming to Mark for obvious reasons — and afterwards, Mr. Hinckley's remarks, so characteristic of this true philanthropist, who has made a life-work of rearing homeless, parentless boys and girls, that they may well be quoted in full.

"Dear children and friends," he said —

"To-day is the most sacred and inspiring of all we celebrate, the natal day of our blessed Saviour. It is a day of rejoicing, of good cheer, of good-fellowship the world over. A day when all Christendom becomes one in spirit and impulse, in generous deeds and a better conception of God and our own duties. To-day we exemplify the truism that it is more blessed to give than to receive, to-day we live for others and deny ourselves that others may rejoice. And why? Because to-day a new hope was born in the person of Christ, a new heaven, almost, where mercy, charity, and love shall reign. And now, my children, my boys and girls, I feel to call you, let the lesson of this day be a motive force in your lives. You have been made happy to-day; learn that you in turn should so live and act as to make those around you rejoice as well. Your education and attainments are not for yourselves alone but for others as well. You are young, opportunities are before you, the world honors the men and women who make the most of theirs; who live, not for self but for others. Think of yourselves you must, but not always. Think of others as well and when the chance somes to do for them, do it speedily, bravely, and generously. Keep high ideals in mind. Realize what others have done for public good. What sacrifices of time, money and even life. Do something yourselves! Every word and act counts in the grand total! Be heard-of in good deeds. Do what the world will applaud. Not for fame, but to make the world better, brighter, and more worth living in. And above and beyond all, dear children, remember that whosoever lives most unselfishly is doing our Saviour's work, and joining the impress of this Christmas day with that of all days."

A brief benediction and words of dismissal came next, the young congregation filed out with due decorum, then trooped away in bunches again to begin their hilarious, wholesome sports until the dinner call rounded them up once more.

But all the cordial home atmosphere of Good Will — well named — all its pertinent example of what one self-sacrificing man can do, only served to make Mark realize how helpless, how miserable poor Myrtle must now be. How she, without much education, no home memories, no Christmas days to recall, no precept and example of love and kindness to encourage, was perhaps fighting for bread, for shelter, for clothing and her honor may be; alone and friendless in a great world!

He was helpless to act. He had done all that time, thought, and money could do. Where she had gone or what she was doing was a blank wall, a pall of darkness. He had endured it now for five months with only one gleam of fitful light and it seemed likely that it must always shadow his life. Even Mr. Hinckley's cheery "Good-bye, and God bless you, my boy, come again," at parting failed to lighten it much. And when Mark and Mrs. Upson parted at B —— Junction, he to speed onward, alone toward the city, back came his melancholic mood once more.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE LAST OF ASKING

For two weeks now Myrtle had tramped the streets of Athens in a vain search for some employment. Her one pair of shoes were worn out completely, her clothing — too thin for winter exposure — shrank from many snow and rain soakings and dryings, the edges of her skirts were frayed, her cheeks sunken and eyes hollow from heart-breaking worry, loss of dinners and scanty food each night and morn. She had been insulted by brutal men who classed her as vile, mud-splashed by the prancing horses of the wealthy, and to crown all, was escorted to the station house once by an over-zealous policeman and only escaped confinement through her tearfully told tale. This latter humiliation was also the outcome of Parson's vile spirit for she had been pointed out to this officer by him as one he should arrest. Her money in the meantime had dwindled to four dollars for she had to have another pair of shoes and as the Cassidy girls were still out of work, Myrtle perforce knew she must pay for her board. Then food here grew thinner and less of it. Potato soup with scarcely any meat, stale fish, bread without butter, and steeped-over tea without milk comprised it, and still further to cripple this poor family, Tim fell off his tip-cart one cold day and broke his arm. Their coal bin grew low, rent day was staved off by a partial payment and then one evening in a kind of mutual need discussion it transpired that some restaurants in the business portion of the city had girls who served there through the mid-day for their dinners only. Myrtle took the hint — not meant — and next day went in search of such a chance. But the dull season was on, other shop-girls beside herself were idle, and she failed to find even a chance to wait on table for a meal.

"I don't know what I am going to do," she moaned to Agnes that night, "I can't find any work, my money is 'most gone, and I can't stay without paying, I know."

"Oh, ye can a spell," asserted Agnes who knew the family's condition, "we won't turn ye into the strate, niver, but uv course the rint must be paid."

A last resort admission, somewhat like that of starving sailors on a raft who assert lots must be drawn to decide who shall be eaten.

"Have ye iver a thing ye kin pawn?" Agnes added hopefully. "Jist fer a wake or two an' by then ye may find a place."

"Nothing but my best dress," answered Myrtle sadly, for she now knew the meaning of the three-ball sign,—"and I must put that on soon, this is 'most worn out," and she glanced at her frayed and much-soiled skirt.

"But we can mind it," rejoined Agnes, well used to makeshifts, "let's see the ither," and it was shown her.

"Ye cud git six dollars on it an' maybe siven," she added examining the simply-made waist critically. "It's foine silk, shure, but not much trimmin'."

"I'd hate to part with it," sighed Myrtle, "it's the only nice dress I ever had." Then she stroked its glossy folds fondly.

But now the pinching of dull times and poverty grew worse for a bitter cold week set in, the Cassidy coal bin was empty, no food in the house and only three dollars in reserve towards next rent day.

"Shure we haven't much to ate, me darlin's," asserted Mrs. Cassidy that morning, pouring the last of the coal on the kitchen fire, "an' we do be owin' the ghrocers twinty-one dollars, the coal man twilve, an' I hate to ax for more thrust." Then she glanced at Tim with his arm in a sling, at her two daughters both watching her, and Myrtle most solemn-faced of all.

"I can go to the thracks an' pick up a hod o' coal the day," asserted Tim, "me one arm is good."

"An' I can go to the bake-shop fer a basket o' stale bread an' cake, it's a quarther a basket," added the city-wise Agnes.

"And I will pay for my this week's board and room," admitted Myrtle, conscious that her fate was linked to these people, temporarily.

But it left her only forty cents and a realization that the grim spectre of utter destitution was drawing nearer. And that day, weakened as she now was from lack of nourishing food, almost hopeless of finding work, with this family's pitiful plight to accentuate her situation, she started out to find something — anything to do.

It was bitterly cold, store windows were white-frosted, the small ones bordering Poverty Land, Myrtle now visited, were minus any customers, their proprietors cross and surly, and this woe-begone, scantily clad, shivering girl, was accorded scarce a word. A dozen of them were tried by her without result, except to depress her, then she turned her steps over to the city's more important marts. Dry goods, shoe, millinery, jewelry, and even hardware stores were tried by this desperate, courageous girl, but none needed such as her. She entered florists', to recall her own little flower garden sadly, and ask for work. She visited candy stores, book, notion, glove and drug stores, and finally tried restaurants again, and offered to wash dishes, scrub floors or do anything for her meals. But she was ill-clad, haggard, decidedly sorrowful-looking, and no one in this cold, selfish world ever needs such personages. The sight and smell of food first made her ravenous, then faint and dizzy, her body was numb and chilled all over, and late that afternoon and feeling that she might as well sit down in some obscure corner and freeze to death — a painless going she had heard — she turned her steps once more to Bank Street, and the dark covered alleyway just across from Number Forty-two, then chilled to the bone she staggered back. Twilight began to shadow the city, and lights to glow, and then like some desperate, hunted animal, so she now peeped out to watch the homeward-hurrying throng. Not one glanced at her, unless it was to suppose she was some starving street walker and not look again. Life in the great city had left her out in the cold she knew, there was no hope now except to pawn her one best dress, no food or shelter she would accept after the money from that was gone, and now as she watched for one possible — and last — glimpse of Mark's face, she resolved after that to go back to M Street, give the dress to Agnes, confide her one secret to her, ask her to take a certain sacred envelope to Mark's office next day and then — steal out that night and let the deathly chill do its work.

All this she planned, this courageous, self-reliant, but now hopeless waif, and with a grim resolve to carry it out.

But even a sight of Mark's face was denied her, for though he hurried away from the building well-muffled, while she watched, the lights were frost-dimmed and she saw him not. She waited hopeless, despairing, until no more men emerged from Forty-two, then thoroughly chilled, she staggered back to M Street.

And that night she could eat no food, for now a strange nausea and headache assailed her, and when morning came she was in a raging fever.

Starvation, exposure, and chilled blood had done their fell work!

All that day she tossed and turned in bed, in her little back room with a hard cough and alternate chills and fever and always headache to add pain. Mrs. Cassidy brought toast and tea but Myrtle could not eat a morsel. Agnes bathed her head when the hot spells were on and Tim freshened the fire in her tiny stove when the chill returned.

By night she was worse, the next morning more so, and when evening came again she began to act and talk strangely. To speak to birds in cooing tones, call them Brown Wing, Fan-Tail and Whitey and caw and peep like a sea gull and coax these birds to come and eat.

"Howly Mither, but she's goin' crazy, so she is," asserted Mrs. Cassidy in horror, and crossing herself. "It's the divil stalin' her soul, God save her."

"She's talkin' to birds an' pipin' like 'em," whispered Agnes, "an' they do be crows. I've heard 'em in the counthry."

"We must sind fer a doctor," asserted Mary Ann, shaking her head, "she's that sick she may die. You go, Agnes, an' quick too."

It was two hours that seemed days to those anxious watchers, before that pompous person was escorted up to Myrtle's stuffy, stifling, little room by Agnes. He sniffed, grunted as if he'd entered some noisesome cell, said "Open a window," in sharp command, and then turned to the sick girl. He thrust a clinical thermometer into her mouth, felt her pulse, adjusted a stethoscope to her lungs, listened, pulled the thermometer out, looked at its tell-tale record and turned to Mrs. Cassidy.

"She's got pneumonia," he asserted bluntly, "and double at that. Let her have more air — this room would choke a hog — and keep her body warm." Then he glanced into Myrtle's blankly staring eyes. "Out of her head too, I see," he added, "and not much show for her."

And now without one thought of how this plain, unfeeling diagnosis would affect all present, he whipped out a pad, pencilled a scrawling prescription and handed it to Mrs. Cassidy.

"Once in two hours, madam," he said, and for the first time using a courteous tone "you have a very sick girl and slim chance for her. My call is three dollars, if you please."

He got his money and with a curt "Thank you" and not another word departed.

These were wretchedly poor people, as he saw on the instant, and not worth polite phrases.

Agnes volunteered to go for the medicine — it took about all except the reserved rent money — and it was not until almost morning that any one of those poor but loyal friends left Myrtle's bedside. And it was a night that taxed their hearts and Mrs. Cassidy's eerie superstition as well, for all through it poor Myrtle was back on Folly Island. Now building her playhouse over again, saying how this stone was too small, or that too big, or wrong in shape; again working among her flowers, addressing them by tender names or calling to the gulls once more. Then she seemed to be sure some one was following her, Mark's name was used as the one person she hoped to find and again she would moan, "O dear what shall I do?" in a way that made Mrs. Cassidy shiver.

By morning the medicine began to reach her fever-burned brain, she fell asleep and all but Agnes tiptoed out of the room. It was not for long, the incessant cough soon woke her, but the delirium had passed.

"Where am I and how did I come here?" she whispered scarce recognizing Agnes yet, "I guess I've had an awful dream."

"Shure ye have, darlin'," returned Agnes tenderly, "ye've bin talkin' to crows, liftin' stones, an' scart o' somebody all night. Ye'll be better now, me darlin'," she added hopefully, "an' it's toime fer yer midicin." Then this loyal little Irish lass — God bless her — measured a spoonful, gave it to Myrtle, lifted her head and shook out the one pillow, and smoothed and adjusted the bed-clothes.

Little things, but how they comfort us when our poor bodies are pain-racked!

The rest came in later, one by one, to say "Good mornin'," but about all Myrtle could do was smile an answer, and all that day she either dozed fitfully between spasms of coughing or watched Agnes with pitiful, hopeless eyes. They seemed larger than ever now and twice as appealing when turned to one or another of those four friends (though oftenest to Agnes) and a cloud of gloom settled over that household. The weather moderated a good deal, however (which they all felt thankful for), Tim spent most of the day following the railroad tracks far out of the city to pick up even nut-size bits of coal, Mary Ann visited the bakery to buy another basket of three-day-old eatables, but Agnes never left the sick-room.

By night Myrtle seemed to grow weaker, she could no longer lift her head to take medicine and momentary delirium returned.

"Shure her eyes is follerin' me all over the house," moaned Mrs. Cassidy to Mary Ann in the kitchen, "an' the poor crayther has got to die. I think we'd better sind for the praste."

"I'll go fer him now," responded Mary Ann, swallowing a sob and she hurried away on that sad errand. He came sooner than the doctor did, for Catholicism is never a laggard when death calls. It was also a pitiful, tearful group, who now knelt around Myrtle's bed while Father Mooney began to intone the solemn service for the dying in Latin on his knees with hands upraised in supplication. Then he arose, drew forth a vial of holy water, sprinkled a few drops upon Myrtle's face, first kissed, then laid a small black cross on her breast and knelt again in prayer.

And now his voice was scarce audible above the sobs.

What it all meant beyond the fact that she was dying Myrtle knew not, only that having been to church this kind priest meant to console her now. Nothing could bring consolation, however, save one face and that was denied her. Yet to see that now bending over her would be to enter her final sleep without fear or regret. She had kept her faith, she felt, had tried to do the best she could and earn her honest way as he had said she should. But it was all over now and the end near.

And then glancing from one to another of the faces — still tearful — grouped about her, back to Folly Island and her playhouse she flew in thought. Once more she was beside her little garden and the flowers, heard the low monotone of the sobbing ocean, and saw Mark smiling at her.

Then she closed her eyes.

When she opened them again Agnes only was near and seated on the bed.

And now once more duty yet hers to do recurred to Myrtle. She had thought of it many times these last, half-starved, desperate days, and made ready as well.

"There's something in my trunk, Agnes dear," she whispered faintly, "an envelope down in one corner. Please get it for me?"

Agnes did so hurriedly, saw it was addressed, "Mark Mason, Forty-Two Bank Street, or at The Elms Hotel," and handed it to Myrtle. She took it, kissed it once, twice, thrice, and returned it to Agnes.

"There's money in it," she again whispered, "it belongs to that man. He — he was my friend once. Now when I — I am gone, promise me you will give it to him."

"An' shure I will, on me sowl, so help me God," Agnes answered crossing herself, and choking back a sob.

Then a look of supreme, glorified peace and content came over the sick one's face. Her last will and testament was made and signed, her duty done, her debt paid.

And now she closed her eyes and dozed off, ready for her final dreamless sleep.

But a flash of new light, an inspiration beyond her years had come to Agnes, and she stole out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MILLS OF GOD

Among all the various allurements occupying the minds of men there is not one so universal, so absorbing and likewise pernicious, as the gambling instinct, the get-something-for-nothing desire. It seems to be an inherent taint, and so general is it that even those who legislate against that evil or others loudest in condemnation of it, will now and then buy a lottery ticket, bet a few sly dollars on some ball-game, or do a little smuggling when the chance comes.

Parsons or "Artie," that crowing rooster of "The Emporium's" hosiery department of course had the desire, in fact to gamble was one of his dominating impulses, only perforce it had to be for small stakes or a dollar or two bet on some ball-game. He wagered a good deal with his mouth, however, or whenever any sporting event was mentioned and he had a listener, or if none was on, then the stock market served as an excuse to brag. The fact was that he had never bought or sold a share of stock for obvious reasons.

But one evening, soon after Myrtle had been practically forced out of "The Emporium" by him, he met a Mr. Moore, proprietor of a well known bucket-shop in Athens, at a sporting resort, and as usual indulged in some vainglorious boasting.

Moore, a shrewd gambler of his kind, soon measured Parsons' scope and as he would say "laid for him." It was an easy matter. A few nods and smiles of approval of Parsons' assertions, and their outcome, a little judicious flattery and simulated admiration and the victim was hooked. Then Moore began an exhaustive dissertation on an especially good thing he knew about, the D. & S. railroad stock, how low it was then selling (about forty-two), how sure it was to advance, and how he had inside knowledge of a bull pool who were soon to put it up twenty or thirty points. He also claimed he was heavily long of it as well, and anxious to have others obtain a few slices of this most excellent market pie. It was all the same old hackneyed line of argument perpetually used by stock gamblers to shear lambs, only Moore didn't spread it broadcast in the press in the usual manner, and Parsons was tempted.

"You can't lose money on D. & S.," Moore asserted, in conclusion, "if you buy small lots at first, ten or twenty shares, then as it goes up and reacts a point or so double your holdings. Why, it's just like finding money to buy D. & S."

And it was — for him.

"Come around to my office to-morrow, Mr. Parsons, Room Ten, Granite Building," he concluded, "and let me put you onto a good thing."

"I may drop in when I leave my office for lunch," returned Parsons, as if he had vast business matters on his hands, "and possibly I might take a flyer in D. & S. for luck."

And he did call the next day noon hour to find D. & S. had made almost a two points' advance that morning.

"You see I was right," Moore asserted, greeting him effusively, "D. & S. is going to climb and had you come in this morning see how much you might have been ahead on it."

And Parsons who had about thirty dollars with him — half of what he owed his tailor — felt that now was the accepted time in D. & S. stock.

"You may buy me ten shares as a starter," he directed, "I am going to follow your advice and go careful. If it advances of course I shall go in heavier." He was soon supplied, the two points' margin, or twenty dollars, whisked into Moore's till as if so much waste paper, and Parsons given a slip showing that he had bought ten shares D. & S. stock at forty-three and three-quarters, and from that moment onward all that occupied his mind was the price of D. & S.

He watched the varying quotations chalked on a blackboard by an active boy now for nearly all his lunch hour. Saw it advance a half-point, back another, up again, and when he left it stood at forty-four and a quarter, a half-point above his purchase price. Then he most reluctantly left room ten, bought and munched a sandwich on his way to "his office" and thought only of D. & S. When closing came he grabbed an evening paper and almost shouted when he saw that stock had closed at forty-five!

And that evening he assured every person he knew — and met — and a few he never had seen before, that he had made over two hundred dollars in the market that day on D. & S.!

Next morning, and as usual with all embryo stock gamblers, he read every line of financial news and gossip in three papers and accepted each word favorable to an advance in stocks, as gospel truth. More than that, so sure was he now that D. & S. was bound to go up, his sole thought was of how he could raise money to buy more. To remain at his post in The Emporium that forenoon also when he might be or ought to be in the broker's office watching D. & S.

advance was durance vile to him, and his impecunious condition worse than galling. Here and now was a great and glorious chance to make money if only he had capital to work with! But how to get it?

There wasn't a person he could borrow more than a dollar or two from, his sole possession of value was a small diamond ring worth perhaps seventy-five dollars and now in this extremity he resolved to pawn that. When noon came he almost ran out of The Emporium, hurried to the nearest three-ball sign and then on to Moore's office with forty dollars obtained on his ring.

And here he was made nearly insane from speculative greed for D. & S. had shot up three points more since morning, back again to forty-six and was now advancing again!

"I might have closed you out at forty-eight and made you fifty dollars," Moore assured him smilingly, "but I didn't dare. D. & S. is booming as I told you it would and may go up ten points more before the close. What you want to do is buy, buy, and soon too!"

There wasn't any question about that in Parsons' mind now and as soon as he could count out forty dollars he was the (ostensible) owner of twenty shares more. He also went without his dinner again in feverish watchfulness of the quotation now fluctuating between forty-six and forty-seven, and not until he barely had time to reach The Emporium by one o'clock when he must and register, could he tear himself away from this thrilling occupation. And so much a slave did he now feel he almost cursed that hive of industry, his employers and himself!

And that night as if the fickle goddess of chance meant to first madden him with joy and then destroy him, D. & S. closed at forty-eight, and a quarter, showing him a total profit of seventy dollars — on paper!

And that evening also, Parsons not only enlarged his boastful assertions to sums varying from three hundred to a thousand dollars, but spent almost every cent he had left in treating and became hilariously intoxicated besides!

He wasn't of much benefit to the hosiery department the next forenoon, either, for most of his time was used in perusing the papers, and he read the previous day's opening, highest, lowest, and closing price of D. & S. in all of them at least a dozen times.

A drop came in his roseate hopes of sudden wealth, however, when he again entered Moore's office at twelve-five exactly, and saw D. & S. was then quoted at forty-four, a fall of nearly five points since the opening! And he almost gasped the query, "Why?"

"Oh, merely a little realizing by timid longs," Moore assured him, suavely, "but you want to show sand now and not let go. I may have to call for more margin, Mr. Parsons," he added nonchalantly, "but don't be scared on that account. D. & S. is sure to go up again."

And then this tenderfoot speculator began to quake, for how was he to raise more money? He passed a most miserable hour this noontime also in alternate hopes and fears watching D. & S. fluctuations and the fears predominated for that "Dead sure" stock, as Moore had once called it, kept falling by eighths and quarters. It was, when the hour of suspense ended, down to within a half-point of his margin line and Parsons returned dinnerless to "The Emporium" and feeling woe-begone and faint as well, for his sudden riches were vanishing. A worse blow came by two p. m. in a message from Moore calling for forty dollars additional margin "by ten o'clock next morning, sure!"

And then Parsons had cold chills, for how could he obtain it?

As it chanced, also, so just is Fate sometimes, that very afternoon, (a bitter cold one as well) was the one when poor Myrtle made her last hopeless effort to find employment. Unknown to her the mills of God were grinding out justice and her persecutor was caught in the wheels!

But obtain more money he must or lose all he had put into this gambling hopper and Parsons was driven to his wits' end. They landed him, as they always will such as he, at thievery, and late that afternoon he sneaked into "The Emporium" store room, watched his chance, hid three rolls of valuable lace under his vest and that night sold it to a receiver of such.

He had fallen to the level of an ordinary thief now, but he had obtained the needful margin.

For the next week he lived a year of suspense and worriment, haunting Moore's office each noon, going dinnerless to do so, and sleepless much of each night. He kept on boasting, however, alternating it between his gains and losses as the fancy struck him. He didn't do much more treating though, for obvious reasons, and that week to crown his misfortunes his landlady trusteed his wages at "The Emporium."

"It mustn't happen again," the head manager assured him curtly, "or you lose your job. We won't have process-servers enter this establishment!"

And then as a climax to all, D. & S. took another drop of two points and a call for more margin came. Also another sly visit to the stock room that afternoon by Parsons. But this time another department manager (who hated him for reasons of his own) saw him secrete four more rolls of lace beneath his clothing and stuff a few dozen pairs of kid gloves into his pockets.

And that night a plain-clothes officer grasped him by the arm as he left the store.

"Wha — what you want?" gasped the astonished Parsons quaking.

"Want you, or the bosses do," the officer returned facetiously, "they're goin' to promote you to another job."

And then the valiant, vainglorious boaster, Parsons, the hero of many amours, embryo speculator and contemptible persecutor of an honest girl, cringed and whimpered like a whipped cur. There was no help for him now, however, back to the office of his employers he was hustled in short order, the stolen lace and gloves taken from his person, and that night he cursed luck and everything else in a cell. Neither did he do any more boasting either for next day he was relegated to private life in an institution for such as he, and hard labor for two years.

And no one in all Athens felt to pity him.

There was also another outcome of Fate in this drama of life that took place on Folly Island which unpleasant though it be, must be mentioned.

From the moment Cap'n Jud fled in awful terror from the — supposed — apparition of his own daughter he never again returned to sanity. He had had two months already of ghost-haunted existence, had seen Myrtle's spectral appearance scores of times at the fish-house, along the wave-beaten shores, at the bridge, or nights about the house. He had grown older and haggard from the constant dread of this, his days became one continued fear, nights more so, and Folly Island an accursed spot. Conscience, too, or its counterpart, supernatural fear, began to do its fell work, and beyond that the more pertinent fear of what action Sandy Bay might take. He knew now how all there felt toward him, how they believed him solely responsible for his grandchild's death, and any night might make him the threatened visitation with promised coat of tar and feathers. So afraid had he become that he scarce dare visit Dark Harbor again for needed supplies or to dispose of his fish and lobsters.

And then came this last and worst ghostly appearance — his own daughter emerging from the fish-house!

Go there he must, and did next day in fear and trembling; fish and set his pots also he must from force of habit, mainly; but now the sea's moaning seemed a human voice, the wind's whistle a woman's cry of anguish, and the booming of monster billows, the shout of demons. All nature seemed conspiring to pursue and avenge Myrtle's death, and accepting it as such, Cap'n Jud grew fearsome, watchful, and always expecting to see another ghost. Neither did he dare venture out fishing when the sea raged but sat for hours, sometimes all day, watching out upon it in silent dread. And not once again did he go to Dark Harbor.

There could be but one outcome from this and in two weeks Aunt Perth was forced to visit Sandy Bay.

" I dunno what's come over the Cap'n," she complained to Amos Orton who greeted her kindly, " he hain't ben himself since — since that awful thing happened, 'n' he 'pears to be losin' his mind. Wuss'n that, thar ain't nothin' left to eat in the house 'n' he don't seem to care.

"I know thar's ben feelin' here agin him," she added, plaintively, " but 'tain't from no fault o' mine."

" Wal, I'm sorry fer you, Aunt Perth," Amos responded, conscious of what her errand here meant, " 'n' ye kin hev anything out o' the store ye want.

We don't keer overmuch fer Cap'n Jud, but you won't be 'lowed to go hungry. Jes' tell me what ye need."

And tell she did, and quite a long list as well for it transpired that the Folly Island cupboard was minus everything except potatoes.

"But why don't the Cap'n go 'n' sell some fish 'n' lobs to Dark Harbor," Amos interrogated, after jotting down her lengthy order for groceries. "He's fishin' some, ain't he?"

"Not much," she returned mournfully, "jist mopes 'round all day 'n' dassent go out when it blows any. He acts scart all the time."

"Scart o' what?" queried Amos, beginning to weigh out a dollar's worth of sugar.

"Why, spirits," Aunt Perth asserted ominously, "he thinks the island's ha'nted now by—by the spirit o' poor Myrtle 'n' 'bout four weeks ago he seen her mother's, too, 'n' didn't leave the house fer two days arter. He didn't dare go to bed, either, jist sot up all night 'n' kept the light a burnin'. It's awful, I tell ye, to hev a man act that way, 'n' he hears somebody walkin' 'round the house or upstairs all the time. I'll go crazy myself if it keeps on much longer."

Many more of the uncanny hallucinations now pursuing Cap'n Jud were related by his sister while Amos packed up her grocery order, then he harnessed his one sedate nag, helped her into the wagon and, leaving the store to care for itself, drove to Folly Island with the much-needed supplies.

"I guess Cap'n Jud's perty much all in," he asserted to Barney and a few others that evening in the store, "'n' fast goin' crazy, too! I found him squat back o' the stove when I took some things down to-day 'n' he never spoke to me. Just sot 'n' watched me with skeered eyes like he didn't knows me, 'n' it made me feel creepy, too, I tell ye! He's growed thin ez well, face all sunk in 'n' grinnin' like a skull. 'Pears to me he's reapin' what he's sowed, 'n' perty fast too."

"Begorra, that's consolin'," responded Barney with evident satisfaction, "an' 't'll be a blessin' to the ould woman whin he croaks. Did ye tell her we heard the gal's alive?"

"No," admitted Amos regretfully, "I s'pose I'd orter, though, 'n' save her worryin'. She ain't to blame fer what happened."

"Better save it 'till the Cap'n's flewed the coop," asserted another of the group, "it'll chirk her up some then 'n' sorter reckonsile her to bein' a pauper, ez I s'pose we'll hev to take keer on her arter the

Cap'n goes," and thus and so was the outcome of that much-despised man's life now discussed at Sandy Bay.

He knew it not, however, or aught else of ordinary human feeling or interest. Only that some strange influence was stealing strength and reason alike, and turn where he would, some spectral shape confronted him. The winter was now adding its menace of icy blasts and stormy days to shut him indoors, the island white with snow, and each night as Aunt Perth, ever faithful, kept the fire alight, he sat by the stove and shivered while mountainous waves thundered all about and made the island tremble. And sitting thus one night, long after Aunt Perth had retired and like a cowardly wretch, scared at every noise, he heard, faint above the billows' booming, the sound of footsteps somewhere in the house. First overhead, then softly creeping down the stairs they came. Not rapidly, but very slowly, a faint creak of a loose board, a soft pat of bare foot stepping on it. Soon a door was heard to open on its rusty hinges slowly and cautiously, a breath of cold air chilled his face, and once again those weird, mystic footsteps began, this time in his own room close by, and then in the kitchen. They were all about the house now, creaking, creeping, slow and cautious, faint yet distinct above the rising and falling boom and roar outside. And then another eerie sound was added, the light persistent tap, tap, tapping of a death watch in the wainscoting back of the stove! The lamp was now burning low, the fire as well, and the room growing cold.

And just then while Cap'n Jud felt an icy chill creeping over him, there in the window he faced he seemed to see Myrtle! Her face was ghastly white, eyes widely staring, hair wet and clinging about it. For one long, horrible moment she stared at him then slowly, very slowly, that ghostly, grewsome, blood-curdling spectre, seemed to enter the closed window! Nearer, nearer, it came to the horror-stricken, cowering brute, unable to move, scarce able to breathe. Now ten feet away, now five, now close by; until the pallid face and glassy eyes were bending over him and two icy hands clasping his throat.

And now from without came the scream and shriek of a thousand demons filling the night and darkness with menacing sound. They moaned and groaned from far down the island! They bellowed and boomed as they drew nearer! They crashed and crackled like gun-shots close by and amid all this medley of threatening voices the fainter click, click, as of bones striking together. Now and then came a thunderous, crashing blow, making the dwelling tremble; while back and forth along the spray and spume washed rock-ribbed shore that demoniac army now advanced; now retreated.

The room grew chillier, the light dimmer, and barely breathing now and unable to move, Cap'n Jud still cowed and cowered beneath that horrible dead face and glassy eyes close to his, and the two clammy hands about his throat.

And then horror-stifled and horror-stricken as he was, darkness came and death entered there.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A VOICE FROM THE DARKNESS

Mark in slippers and smoking jacket was enjoying his favorite cigar in his room at "The Elms" that night when the housemaid knocked on the door.

"Thar's a gurl below, sir," she said, her head appearing in response to his "Come in," "an' she wants to see ye sir, an' quick, she says."

"Show her up, Bridgey," he responded, wondering who it could be and in a moment Agnes appeared.

"I hev a missage fer ye — in this invelope, sor, wid money"— she gasped for she had run over a mile, "it's from a dyin' girl, sor,— an' will ye plase come to her quick, sor — for the love o' God, sor!"

How Mark sprang up with a "Good God!" and instantaneous thought of who it was; how that Barker House envelope confirmed it, how he grabbed coat and hat — forgetting his slippered feet — and grasping the astonished messenger's arm, almost dragged her down stairs, needs no description. He still retained hold of her while they raced to a near-by cab stand and then Mark halted.

"I want a carriage quick," he shouted to a driver. "Where is she?" he added, turning to Agnes. "Twinty-siven M Strate" came from her with a snap, and then Mark faced the cabby again. "Take us there quick as God'll let you," he commanded, "run your horses where you can, it's ten dollars if you do," and he almost threw Agnes into the cab.

And now while they swayed, bumped, and rattled along the stony, frozen streets,—a trip that seemed to tear his heart asunder lest he be too late—Agnes blurted out bits of Myrtle's recent history, and present condition in an incoherent jumble.

"She didn't sind me, sor," she said finally, "jist towld me to take the money to ye whin she was dead. But I'm no fool, sor, I knew her heart was stharvin' an' I ran all the way."

And then Mark felt like clasping and kissing that brave quick-witted, little Irish lass!

But another cab had reached M Street soon after Agnes left it, and a handsomely gowned young woman wearing ermine furs, knocked at Mrs. Cassidy's door.

"I'm a friend of Myrtle — Miss Stone, I mean," she asserted to that surprised person, "and I called to see her."

"She's awful sick, dyin' soon, God rist her soul," came the pathetic answer, "but ye kin see her, come in."

There were tears in Cindy's eyes when she knelt beside Myrtle's bed and kissed her feverish lips, but a smile of gratitude and hope followed on the sick one's face.

"I am so glad to see you, Cindy," she whispered, and then she reached for Cindy's hand, stroked, and finally pressed it to her lips, for all memory of the chasm between them had left her now. A long interval of many fond looks and few whispered words ensued, then a knock, so loud that it reached the sick-room, and Mary Ann — knowing whom it must mean — beckoned Cindy to follow her out of it.

"We have sint fer some man she knows," she whispered to her, "an' she shud see him alone. You onderstand."

"I do," nodded Cindy, also knowing who it was, and both stepped into another room just as Agnes, followed by Mark ascended the stairs, pointed to Myrtle's room and joining them, closed the door and began to sob.

And now came the one most sacred, crucial moment in Mark's life!

One instant only he paused to see the look of utter surprise and ineffable joy illumine Myrtle's face, the next he was kneeling beside her and both head and pillow were clasped in his arms. And while he kissed her face and lips as only a strong man can when deep love utters heart-throbs before death ends them, warm tears christened this first, and may be last, love clasp!

"My God, my darling!" came from him now as he lowered head and pillow, smoothing that as a tender mother would, "Oh, why didn't you come to me long ago, oh, God, why didn't you?"

"Because I saw you one night and you — you looked at me — cold," she faltered, "I — I thought you — didn't care and you had some one with you."

"But I never saw you," he almost shouted, "and that was — oh, my darling, we — I have been hunting everywhere for you for months!"

An incoherent answer but excusable.

And then the wretched, stifling little room, the house and M Street poverty with this sick girl lacking all medical care, perhaps, recurred to this man of quick thought in an instant! There was no time to waste now. Death was near. To act at once was imperative and he sprang to his feet.

"Here," he said, going to the door, "some one come quick, please," and Agnes followed by her sister and Cindy appeared.

"This girl must be taken to a hospital now," he ordered, looking at Cindy, "it's the only hope I believe. Will one of you go in my carriage to Mercy Hospital — I know Dr. Hooker — tell him I sent you and to come at once with you. Also send an ambulance with plenty of blankets and two foot-stoves and quick, too, for God's sake!"

"I'll go," responded Cindy, "I'm her friend and I'll do anything!"

"Please, sor, may I go too?" put in Agnes. "I can do something. Maybe I kin hurry the doctor a bit." And then Mark led the way to his waiting carriage.

"Take these ladies to Mercy Hospital," he now commanded the driver, "bring them and a doctor back, and run your horses all you dare again. It's another ten for you." Then he returned to the sick room.

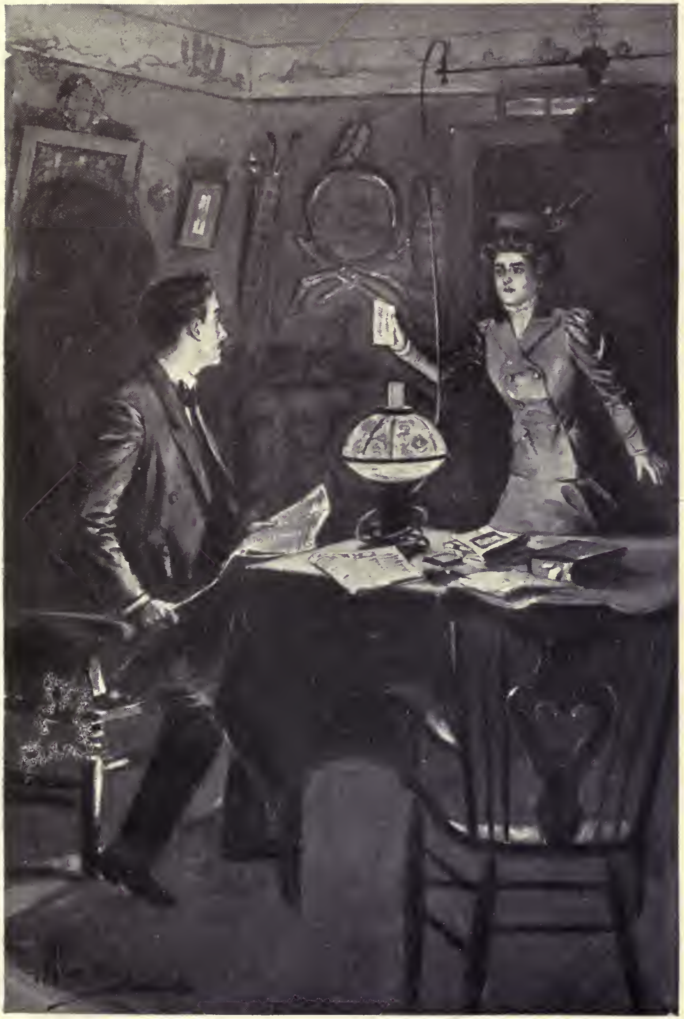
What tender words of love, encouragement, and fond reproach he now whispered to Myrtle shall never be quoted, for they are too sacred for these pages. A life history, aye, a two-life one was included in them, and a soul-union as well. There were kisses on Myrtle's face, meanwhile, such as a mother would lavish on her dying babe, her hand never left his retaining clasp once during that hour's wait, and just the barest outlines of her desperate flight and fight with a merciless world — her own six months of heart-starvation also — were whispered by her.

Only one secret was retained by Mark — her mother's existence — and that was to be used as a last resort and incentive in the battle for life he now knew must be fought. And it was a slim one, as Dr. Hooker asserted by one ominous shake of his head after he arrived and examined Myrtle.

"The hospital's her only chance, my boy," he declared to Mark outside the sick room, "and you were wise to send for an ambulance. She'll die anyhow in that stifling cell and we may pull her through. I see your heart's in it," he added with a slight smile of pity, "and I'll do my best."

"Yes and every dollar I'm worth as well," rejoined Mark soberly, "so spare no expense. It's a thousand-dollar fee for you if you save her."

And now came the removal — an act of daring most doctors will say meant death anyhow — yet it was undertaken. A few blankets and two patent warmers came with the ambulance, which with closed doors was now fairly warm. All the Cassidy outfit of bed-quilts was pressed into service, and then



"I hev a missage fer ye — in this invelope, sor." — *Page 469.*

Myrtle, wrapped like a mummy — and willing to die now, so happy was she — was carried in Mark's strong arms down two flights of stairs and into the ambulance, Cindy and Agnes climbing in also, squatting on the floor, and Mark, still clasping that more than precious burden, while the other two, devoted as sisters, held blankets around the sick one and Dr. Hooker followed in the carriage. And now as the ambulance moved away the two women left stood in their door watching it with teary eyes.

"Shure an' ambulance is much worse than a hearse, so it be, Mary Ann," exclaimed Mrs. Cassidy, "wid no glass in the sides to show the coffin an' no plumes on top to show rispict for the dead. Ah, wurra, wurra, but me heart is near breakin' for the poor gurl."

And all this within less than three months of acquaintance!

But hospital rules are as rigid as a prison's, not even Mark was allowed more than to whisper a few tender, encouraging words to Myrtle, after bearing her to the room and bed assigned her. But his heart had gathered a trifle of hope in the meantime; for she had stood the trip well, a new courage lit her appealing eyes, and a new joy illumined her face.

"I'm going to live now for — for you," she whispered, in answer to them, "and — and — God bless you, sir!"

A queer reply — the last part — to come from a girl whom he had just assured that he meant to marry, and yet its unspoken gratitude made him swallow a lump in his throat!

Cindy, Agnes, and the bundle of extra blankets were now crowded into his carriage, he followed, ordering caby to drive again to M Street, and after helping his two companions out as courteously as if they were fine ladies, he drew Agnes aside.

"Little girl," he said gently, as he pulled out a pocket book, "I don't even know your name yet but the devotion you have showed the girl I love, and what you have done to-night has won you a warm friend. Here is fifty dollars — not pay for it, no money can be — but to give you and your family some things they may need."

"I won't take it, sor, plase, an axin' yer pardin," she answered firmly. "It ain't fer money I come to you, sor, but love o' the poor darlin', me frind," then she began to sob again.

"I know it," asserted Mark as firmly, "but you can hand it to your mother anyhow and to-morrow come to my office, Forty-two Bank Street, I want to talk with you." Then he shook hands with the rest, thanked them each in turn, Cindy twice, and drove away.

And then that well-garbed young woman whose social standing was unknown here uttered a few heart-born words to Agnes.

"A girl who is loved by such a man as that one," she said, "has won all life holds for her, and all she can do won't pay for it." Then she too shook hands with these poor people as if proud to do so, kissed Agnes tenderly and departed without disclosing her name.

With all her faults and follies, it must be asserted, there are few like her among her sisterhood, and perhaps an unhappy home and drunken father should bear the blame for her sins.

But Mark had not even thought of them during this desperate episode and after he left the hospital his first act was to wire Mrs. Upson, "Have found Myrtle, she is very sick, come at once," and then he must pace his room and smoke continuously for sleep was an impossibility. When morning dawned and the city awoke once more he hastened to the hospital and, as expected, was refused admission to Myrtle's room.

"We are doing all possible," Dr. Hooker assured him, "and shall. She is out of her mind now, a result I knew must follow her removal, but she has two trained nurses, the best of care, and I hope to save her. But she has double pneumonia and low vitality — lack of nourishment, I presume — and the odds are against her. The crisis will come in about two days and I will let you see her to-night, a few moments only."

Scant consolation, as Mark now felt, yet enough to inspire the rainbow of hope, and then he betook himself to his office and more cigars while he consulted time-tables and counted hours until Mrs. Upson could arrive.

When Agnes, true as a needle to a magnet in the matter of heart-fidelity and promised duty, called on him later, she was treated as if she were a young queen, though lacking a throne and worldly goods as well. "Shure," she said in her blunt, outspoken way after his kindly greeting, "shure ye do be onlike most min, sor, I kin see an' ye love me frind like ye war God, sor, an' for the bist. An' mither says the same too, sor."

"Why, of course," Mark rejoined, well pleased, "that girl is like my very soul now, and as dear."

"An' wud ye loike to know the whole business, sor," the irrepressible Agnes continued, watching him admiringly, "an' how this all come about, sor?"

"Most certainly," he returned eagerly, "every word of it! Why shouldn't I?"

"Will thin, it war a man, a dom bad, sneaky man thot did it, axin' yer pardon fur the wurrd," she answered viciously. "A snake-toad be the name o' Parsons, her boss in the big sthore whar I got her a place. He war chasin' her 'n' harryin' her 'n' bullyraggin' her to sin all the toime till at lasht an' jist before Christmas he towld her it war that or lose her job, an' she quit the sthore. I can't see why God iver made sich bastes as the loikes o' him, sor, an' they ought to be kilt, so they had!"

"Right you are," asserted Mark, his face darkening in a way that boded ill for this "snake-toad." "And now tell me the rest; what happened after she left the store?"

"Why she went job-huntin' in the cold, sor, an' goin' widout her dinners to save the price fer two weeks an' she heartsick all the toime," returned Agnes eagerly. "An' that war heart-throuble, too, sor. She war thot way whin she come to us me an' Mary Ann saw the first toime we tuck her to mass, fer her eyes got full jist at the singin'. An' thot day she towld us thar war some man she cared for but niver towld his name. Shure she must 'a' felt you war loike the Holy One, sor, to be spoken of only in prayers. An' not until lasht night an' she dyin' did she let on, sor, and thin I ran to tell ye till me breath war gone."

"You did, Agnes, God bless you," interrupted Mark, "and you made me your friend for life."

"Thar war somethin' else too, sor," she continued as eagerly and with a curious look at him, "an' it comes to me now. Wasn't it you we saw takin' a leddy into the show one night?"

"It was, Agnes," he answered earnestly, and glad she had mentioned this matter. "That lady was poor Myrtle's mother whom she has never seen since a babe and who has been hunting for her with me for months. It's a curious story that I will tell you some day."

Then the blue eyes of that Irish lass opened still wider.

"Don't the poor darlin' know she iver had a mither?" she queried.

"Not whether she has one living now or not."

"An' whar is her mither now?"

"Coming here as fast as steam can bring her," responded Mark with a heart-leap.

For a long moment Agnes stared at him in blank astonishment until her keen mind had solved a part of the mystery, then she made answer.

"God wouldn't be doin' right to let the poor darlin' die now wid a mither comin' to her," she said, her eyes filling.

And then Mark felt as he had the night before while they two swayed and bumped over the city's byways on their wild ride to M Street.

Much more of this pitiful story was soon told by Agnes, recovering herself. How poverty, want, almost starvation, had come to the Cassidy family, how Myrtle had shared it with them until her money was gone, her last desperate search for work for even a meal in payment, until the end came with its final pathos. Not one item or one shade of the pathetic story did this keen, world-wise man miss, and all through the telling a fierce, almost murderous anger and abhorrence of this fellow, Parsons, surged in his heart. Little did he realize now, however, that at this very moment the mills of God were grinding the grist of Eternal Justice and this despicable brute was receiving his first portion.

Then Mark turned his questions upon Agnes herself and soon learned what her and her sister's chances for immediate employment were, of Tim's mishap, and the family's present needs.

"Would you like to work for me, little girl?" he then queried courteously. "I need a bookkeeper and stenographer and I'd like to employ you."

"But shure I don't know how to kape books, sor," she answered, with astonishment, "or the steno — the other thing, sor. I wisht I did."

"No, I presume not," he smiled, "but I want to hire you just the same. I will pay you seven dollars a week to start with, your duty for a few months will be to attend a business school I shall send you to — and pay for — and once a week report your progress to me and get your pay. Is it a bargain?"

"I'd be a fool, sor, if I didn't take the chance," she returned, her face glowing, "but I won't be arnin' me money to begin wid. Can't I come an' swape and scrub the office betwane times, sor?"

"No, Agnes," the janitor sees to that," Mark responded, again smiling, "all I want you to do is to learn fast, and when I set you to work I'll work you hard enough to make it up."

"Shure it's yer heart thot's spakin', not yer pocket, an' I'll work mesilf blind fer ye whin I can widout a word, so I will," she said.

"Now, Agnes," he continued, turning to his desk and penning a note, "take this to the Brown & Stanton business college next Monday morning and begin your work there. Here is two weeks' pay in advance," he added, counting out fourteen dollars, "and now how about your sister? Would she like a place as chambermaid at 'The Elms' at six dollars a week and meals? She can room at home."

"Shure she wud, an' quick too,' answered Agnes biting her lips, "but you're doin' too much fer us sor, an' plaze can I go to the horshpital aich night an' marnin' now to find how the poor darlin' girl is comin' on an'—an' wud ye give me a paper that'll let me in, sor?"

"Most gladly," returned Mark, now indicting one to Dr. Hooker, "and it will do Myrtle good to see your bright face. And me, too," he added, "so come around here anytime after school and tell me how you are getting on."

And so closed a well-worth-quoting interview between this typical city-born, Irish lass, and a fair sample of the best and noblest among traveling men. A class who were all once sneered at for the follies of a few; whose mental and moral worth to-day will rank with any profession barring none; whose average salaries will and do exceed the money earned by any other class; who are home-makers and good citizens also, and whose worst failing is that they will spend money as though it were autumn leaves and they the owners of vast forests.

And the whole world loves them for it.

But Mark had no thought or care now how liberal he had been with Agnes. She had come to him that night like a voice from the darkness bearing tidings of supreme joy and unspeakable dread as well; she had shown herself a wondrously loyal and brave little girl also, and her acts and tears — honest coin in this cold world — had won from him what no money could buy or money pay for. And so he paid her — not with what he gave her — but with a true interest in her welfare, and unselfish wish to give her an education in some line of remunerative work that she might be less a slave.

But he forgot her for the time being almost as soon as the door closed behind her, for all his soul and his every hope were now at Mercy Hospital.

CHAPTER XL

THE SWORD OF SUSPENSE

There is nothing in life so trying as suspense, and that of waiting and watching while some loved one battles with grim Death is the worst. In Mark's case he could not even watch — only wait. He had done all he could. This loved one's life was now in the hands of others. He could only think, and sigh, watch the slow lapse of time and hope. He could give no thought to business — a dozen letters lay on his desk unopened. He could not even enjoy a cigar, though he smoked continuously in vain effort to ease his mind. He paced his office like a caged lion, consulted his watch once every five minutes, looked up trains again to be sure how soon Mrs. Upson could possibly arrive, tried a morning paper and threw it aside in disgust, went out for lunch and couldn't eat two morsels, and the first consolation after his heart-burst towards Agnes was a telegram, "Shall arrive at eight o'clock, meet me," from Mrs. Upson.

"Eight o'clock, ye gods," he sighed pulling out his watch again, "it's now two, and six hours to wait!"

He knew the hospital rules; knew that not more than once a day would he be permitted to enter even though his wife were there on her dying bed! But now — so miserable was he — he went there to defy rules to the extent of asking to see Dr. Hooker. But he could not.

"I am very sorry, but Dr. Hooker can't be seen," was the attendant's polite answer. "He is engaged now upon an operation."

"Can I find out how Myrtle — Miss Baldwin, is?" Mark next asked, "she was brought here last night you know."

"I couldn't say, sir," the girl returned, "I am not permitted to enter any sick-room — only the regular nurse can," and Mark left the office disconsolate. He halted just across the street to look at the hospital's many windows and wonder which room Myrtle was in and just then — as if to add misery — an undertaker's wagon emerged from its court-yard and rattled away over the stony pavement. He knew the sad burden it carried!

And now to kill time and the merciless dread torturing him, he started away to try to walk it off. One, two, three miles he strode onwards, unconscious which way he went or caring. Out into the brown-stone region where lived the wealthy, through the plain brick, all-alike-house section, until the houses grew smaller, poorer, a jumble of wooden and brick dwellings, and then he bethought himself of M Street. A word of inquiry at a corner grocery and he soon found it, and then that strange, occult sympathy or need of it, that links all humanity rich or poor, led him to Number Twenty-seven and much to his satisfaction Agnes met him at the door.

"Have ye bad news, sor?" she asked anxiously. "Ye gave me an awful start."

"No, little girl," he returned, thankful for so much interest, "I haven't any news. I just came to call and talk with you folks."

"I'm glad to see ye, sor, come in," she replied, "Mither's away washin' an' Mary Ann an' me is fixin' up our best dresses — ye know what for, sor — an' I wint to the horshpital wid the paper but they wouldn't let me in. I'm sorry the kapin'-room is cold, sor," she added, ushering him into it, "we have only the kitchen fire now an' we was sewin' there."

"It's just as well, Agnes," he responded encouragingly, "so long as it's warm. I'll visit with you a few moments there."

And then this well-to-do, polished man of affairs, — so miserable was he — sat on a rickety wooden chair in the small kitchen and passed an hour visiting with these bright Irish girls!

And it did him good, too, for he learned much more, not only of how Myrtle had shared poverty with them but what it actually meant in makeshift and deprivation. He also wrote a request to his landlady to give Mary Ann a position on his account — a matter he had forgotten — and after assuring them of continued friendship and assistance rose to go.

He had not only made them happier than ever before in their lives, but obtained a little happiness as well, for at the door Agnes made a request that warmed his heart.

"Wud they let me into the horshpital wid you, sor," she asked, "an' may I take some flowers for the poor girl? Shure it might comfort her."

It was only a wee little bit of heart-interest, yet such things are as sunshine amid the gloom of despair.

How Mark passed the hours yet to intervene before Myrtle's mother arrived he never knew; only that to be on time he was at the depot a half-hour ahead of it, pacing the platform while he waited. When the train came in and they met, a tense "How is she?" was her first greeting, and a "I haven't been allowed to see her to-day," his ominous answer. He handed Mrs. Upson into a carriage, they were whisked to "The Elms" while he disclosed the outlines of this tragedy and his plan that she be kept in seclusion for the present and why.

"It's not as though she knew of your existence," he urged, "she is a very sick girl, delirious by spells, and your face, or being told who you were might unseat her reason for good. My idea is that you be patient until the crisis has passed, or till she needs all the rallying assistance possible, then I will break the supreme news to her gently by degrees and then —"

"And then," interrupted her mother sobbing, "if her life isn't spared mine will end."

And she meant it!

A halt was made at "The Elms"— Mrs. Upson insisting that she at least have the privilege of looking at the hospital — and then they drove on to it.

And now a good deal of hope and some consolation, was accorded to Mark, for Dr. Hooker assured him that the sick girl was doing well, and added with one of his all-over-the-face smiles, "I shall try my best to saddle a wife on you, young man." Mark was also permitted to remain beside this prospective one alone for fifteen minutes and how many times he kissed her face, her hands, her lips shall not be recorded. The words exchanged were few, however. The word "darling," with the possessive prefixed became a part of each sentence he uttered, the devotion of Agnes was mentioned, his visit to M Street briefly described and when the nurse came back and politely ordered him away, Myrtle's eyes followed him out of the room.

More tears — this time joyful ones — followed his buoyant description of Myrtle's condition to her mother a little later in the carriage, and it was long past midnight that night ere they separated, for much had to be told.

And not one item of that girl's pitiful history and battle for life and honor, known to Mark, was omitted, or failed to smite her mother's heart.

"I shall not sleep," she said when shown to her room by him, "I shall only think, think, think, and reproach myself. I may pray," she added wistfully, "I wish I believed it would do any good."

The next afternoon Agnes appeared at Mark's office quite spick and span in a made-over dress and carrying some flowers.

"Have ye any good news, sor," she queried anxiously on entering, "an' will ye plaze take these flowers to the poor girl? I thought, sor," she added hesitating, "you might tell me whin ye war to be let in to see her an' I'd be there waitin'."

"I saw her last evening," Mark returned smiling at this unique plea, "she is doing well the doctor says, and I told her I'd seen you and you sent love and best wishes. I shall go there again this evening — once a day for me, even, is all they permit — and if you go there at about eight o'clock I'll take you in, too."

"I will, sor, shure," Agnes responded gratefully, "an' I won't stay a minute. Jist have a look an' spake a word an' lave you fer the rest. I know who her heart is hungry for, so I do."

And that night Mark found this loyal little lass awaiting him at the hospital — she had been there an hour, in fact,— but both were denied admission.

"I'm sorry," Dr. Hooker asserted shaking his head, "but I don't think it's best. She's delirious again, we are now keeping her heart action up with oxygen, to-night or to-morrow morning will tell the story and then I'll 'phone you."

"'Phone me! Good God, doctor, that won't do!" asserted the impatient one, "can't I remain here on call?"

"Why, no," returned the doctor bluntly, "not unless you want to sit in this room and wait and that will be a lonesome task."

"I'll stay wid him," interrupted Agnes eagerly, "an' glad I'll be to do it, sor!"

"No, it's better not," the doctor explained, glancing curiously at Agnes, " and there will be time enough. Death won't ensue for some hours if she fails to rally and I'll 'phone you in ample time either way."

And so that medical savant now coolly referred to this life and death race as if it were a mere tug of endurance between two athletes, as indeed it was.

" But there is another matter I must now explain, Doctor," Mark next asserted; " this girl's mother is in the city; she isn't aware of her existence — in fact never saw her since a babe in arms. Now what effect would follow if that mother came in when — when she was very low ? "

" Good, if she was prepared for it, bad if not," the Doctor answered tersely and then Mark and poor Agnes made their exit.

And that night there was much of sympathy and suspense in M Street, and two gloomy faces with aching hearts at " The Elms " for neither Mark or poor Myrtle's mother closed their eyes in sleep.

But to the sick one now fighting for breath and life with a skilled nurse and medical science to aid her it was as if the door of heaven had suddenly opened before her out of a strange, unaccountable horror. First the ever increasing agony of her coughing spells with intervals in which she believed herself lost in a tangle of dark alleys with Parsons pursuing, to wake again to the pain and find the Cassidy family gathered around in tears. Then back once more to Folly Island and her little hut, once gain to caress and kiss its cold stones and beg God to help her now. Then came the black-robed priest to intone her death-bed service while those around added sobs and despair and after that the one supreme moment and her final renunciation of all hope and sending her long-planned farewell message to Mark with the peace of mind and heart and willingness to die that came after.

And then, somewhere and somehow, amid this eerie phantasmagoria of dread dreams and hopeless despair she had opened her eyes to see Mark's face bending over her and hear his words of loving assurance, thrilling her as naught else ever had. Then the little, alert, quick-spoken, always smiling Dr. Hooker came in to grasp her wrist, sound her chest, listen to her breathing and — say nothing. Soon she — not at all sure now but that this was another dream — felt herself gathered up, bedclothes and all, by Mark's eager arms, more blankets wrapped about her and she carried down and out of the house.

And that ride away from M Street (she still in Mark's arms and he kissing her and whispering loving words with Agnes and Cindy holding blankets about her while they were all in some box-like conveyance and total darkness) surely as she then felt and believed, she must be dead now and this was heaven, or she being borne thither! How and why it had all come about was utterly beyond her and not until more fitful dreams (while she again lived her life on Folly Island or was escaping it), had come and gone, and Mark was once more beside her, did that quite helpless and very sick girl realize where she was and whose strong arms had carried her out of the Valley of Despair.

CHAPTER XLI

THE BREAK OF DAY

A CITY is a great throbbing human heart. A gigantic hive of pleasure-seeking, sorrow-suffering humanity, where a few drones spend money in idle luxury while the many work. Where life has become a desperate fight for existence to thousands and all sentiment, generosity, honesty, honor even; trodden out of them by the iron heel of want. A city is also a place of sharp contrasts where public charity buildings often face mansions of the selfish rich, where their carriage horses splash mud on the poor afoot, where funerals meet wedding parties rolling churchward, where banqueters homeward bound jostle starving beggars, where vice in satin sneers at virtue in calico, where imposters thrive and honest folk go hungry, and where God is largely a myth, truth a confession of ignorance, and honor the hall mark of stupidity!

To Mark it was all this and more. A monster, even, whose claws, teeth, and acrid breath, had torn and poisoned the one brave, innocent, honest woman-soul he ever cared for. And now, even, so rigid are rules for the saving of life where it seemed of least value, he must needs be kept away, shut out of participation in a battle that almost meant his own life. He did not rebel, he knew the reason for it and that this one so precious to him was but one among ten thousand in hospital annals. There was no help for it, however. He had done all that love or money could do, the rest was with God, possibly, or Dr. Hooker, certainly, and when Mark and Mrs. Upson, forced by inexorable hospital law to become passive waiters returned to "The Elms" once more, that second night of dread suspense seemed never to end.

And what an interminable, nerve-racking, heart-scaring one it was! They could not talk much, scarce think during that long vigil, only watch the clock whose slow, solemn beats might be measuring the last few moments of a precious existence, or else one another's faces. Now and then forced breaks came while Mark described how Agnes had come to him like a voice out of spirit land and his own frenzied haste to reach M Street; or else a pitiful conning of the life or death chances poor Myrtle had with a mother's tears to add pathos. Midnight was chimed in the low, sweet melody of a distant church bell, yet sounding like a funeral knell. One, two, three and then four o'clock was finally measured by the same "in requiem" tones while they yet waited and then the city began to wake from its few hours of quiet. First one huckster's cart was heard far away and faintly, now another nearer and rattling over a stony pavement with more following, and then, just as the grey light of coming dawn began to compete with the scattered street lights Mark's 'phone bell rang and "The doctor says you may come now," was the merciful message whispered over the line.

Then came a hurried carriage call, and soon these two heart-sick watchers were jolting and swaying away towards Mercy Hospital.

And not even now did they know whether it meant joy supreme or a death-bed parting! More than that, the fiat of hospital law decreed that one of them must yet endure that awful suspense still longer and alone in the grimly bare waiting-room.

"Bring me the tidings soon as possible for God's sake," Mrs. Upson whispered to Mark and then he tiptoed down a long hall and into the sick one's room. Two big, pitiful, pathetic eyes met his; a little feeble hand crept out, mutely asking to be clasped, and as Myrtle felt his big warm one close over hers — the only one that ever had done this so far in her life — she smiled a wan smile of utter content and perfect thankfulness.

She, too, had been awaiting this longed-for moment many hours.

"My darling," he whispered, bending over her, "now you will get well for me, won't you?"

And then, so wearied was she, a blessed life-saving sleep — the first in two days, closed her appealing eyes.

"She has been asking for you all night," the nurse whispered, "but doctor said 'no,' we must wait, for the next two hours are the critical ones and will tell the story."

And they did, but only God knew its finale now or how near to eternal silence poor Myrtle had gone. Neither did that faithful nurse — who had never once left her for thirty-six hours — know; or that all that did save her was the hope that came with Mark's face and the sleep that followed.

And now he, once seated beside her, neither spoke or moved except gently to stroke the inert hand that lay in his for one hour — no, sixty minutes each an hour long — and in that interval he lived a lifetime of dread suspense and faltering hope.

Then a glow of crimson light began to outline the one curtained window, the nurse turned off the softly shining electric bulbs, Myrtle's eyes unclosed, and the nurse smiled.

And well she might, for she alone knew how that one hour of sweet, heaven-sent sleep, had won against death!

"Can I tell her now safely," Mark whispered to the nurse, "tell her some one dearer than I — you know who — is waiting to see her?"

A nod gave the hoped-for assent, and once more he bent over the feeble one.

"There is some one, my darling," he again whispered, "a woman who loves you, waiting to come in. Can you, are you strong enough to see her?"

"I will do anything you ask," came the faint answer, as love glorified her face. "Who is it?"

And now Mark, floundering a bit added another drop of the hope-to-be elixir of life.

"It's your — it's some one you can — it's — it's your mother, my darling," he answered.

One instant's quiver of hand and lips betrayed the shock; a look of wonder and swift flash of unspeakable joy illumined her eyes and Mark rising, felt his hand drawn back and kissed.

One moment later a woman who in that hour's wait had endured a lifetime of torture, entered — heaven.

Her face was drawn and tense, she trembled like an aspen leaf, and bit her lips to choke the sobs. One instant she faltered nearing the bed, the next, eyes like her own met her's and with an "Oh, God be praised!" from her, mother and child were joined with kisses and tears.

Kisses and tears! Kisses and tears! Always and forever the same weak, foolish, silly expressions in this cold, selfish, adamantine world of ours! You are choked back perpetually, bitten by sharp teeth, hid if possible, cursed sometimes! And yet you, despised though you be, are the measure of all joy and sorrow and usher us into life and out of it!

And now at this supreme moment while a mother kissed face, eyes, and lips of her own child after twenty years of heart-starvation with delirious ecstasy and tears; even Mark — strong man that he was — shed tears as well. And the nurse, hardened by many death scenes, also turned away to hide hers.

And just then a ray of morning sunshine — blessed omen — shone athwart that room! Faint at first, like the spark of life it sought to aid and cheer; then broader, stronger, warmer, until it enclosed the two faces still as one, in an aureole of golden promise.

A new day, a new life, a new hope, with love and a mother to bless it was born for the waif of Folly Island.

CHAPTER XLII

A NEW WORLD

An almost balmy winter day was nearing its sunset when three persons alighted from a train at Good Will Farm. One, a stalwart young man, tall and commanding, was half supporting a fair maid warmly clad and wearing sable furs, while assisting him in this devotion was a more mature lady whose eyes disclosed a mother's relation. The girl, not quite as well rounded as when she escaped from Folly Island, still showed traces of her many weeks' battle with Grim Death in pallid face and feeble step. But her lovely eyes were as appealing, her courage as heroic as when she dared that midnight flight into an unknown world. A new beauty, the exquisite charm of loving and being loved, glorified her face and added a Madonna touch. A hasty introduction to Mr. and Mrs. Hinckley awaiting them here soon followed, all five crowded themselves into the two seated sleigh beside the platform, and as the bells began their merry jingle, a few score Good Will boys and girls, gathered to witness this all-important arrival, added a chorus of cheers. And so began a new life here for Myrtle Baldwin, with a strong man's love, a mother's devotion, and every crown worth wearing awaiting her.

And what a transition it was!

In eight months, long ones to her, she had moved onward and upward from a nameless waif and slave, hated, cursed, and beaten, to an unsullied name, a Somebody, with every rose-tinted illusion and promise belonging to Love's garden vouchsafed her, and each step along its primrose-bordered walks in harmony with her own heart-throbs.

Not for long, however, was she content to bask in the sunshine of this new world, this love-elysium, for the bitter truth Cindy had once spoken, "You ain't educated fit for that man," still rankled in her mind, and just as soon as returning health permitted, she set about the self-imposed duty of making herself worthy of her almost God. And she had ample aid at Good Will for Mr. Hinckley's chief axiom was "Knowledge is power," there were plenty of books here to aid its obtainment with teachers of everything, including music, and what with all these to assist and a devoted mother who lived only for her, we will now leave her here for the present.

Mark, of course, could not remain here long. His business, almost entirely neglected for two months, now demanded his attention, and soon he hied himself away to the city, and as he would put it, into the traces once more. There were also other rifts of sunshine illumining this new world that may well be mentioned and one fell athwart the Cassidy home, for Agnes of wonderfully keen mind, had mastered the "Steno — the other thing, sor," in the meantime, was receiving increased wages in Mark's office, and was so devoted to him and so punctual that he felt he could set his watch by her morning arrival. Mary Ann had also been advanced to chief housekeeper at "The Elms," Tim was back at work and the spectre of want had vanished from Twenty-seven M Street.

"Shure, Mr. Mason," observed Agnes one day to him after this had come about, "the best thing next to bein' well is arnin' good wages, an' the next is spendin' 'em fer those ye care for. Whin I go home now wid me tin dollars on swate Saturday night, I do be steppin' on springs. An' the way mither is smilin' now ud do yer heart good fer we don't owe a cint. Then Mary Ann, she's got a stiddy felly now an' they's promised, too, an' to be read in church come Easter. I don't want no felly myself," she continued after a pause, "I don't thrust the min at all, at all, they's bad so they be. I don't mean the likes o' you, sor," she added naively, glancing at

Mark, " for you're not loike the city ones an' I always spake fer you in me prayers an' say God bless the darlin' girl, too, an' the day she come to us."

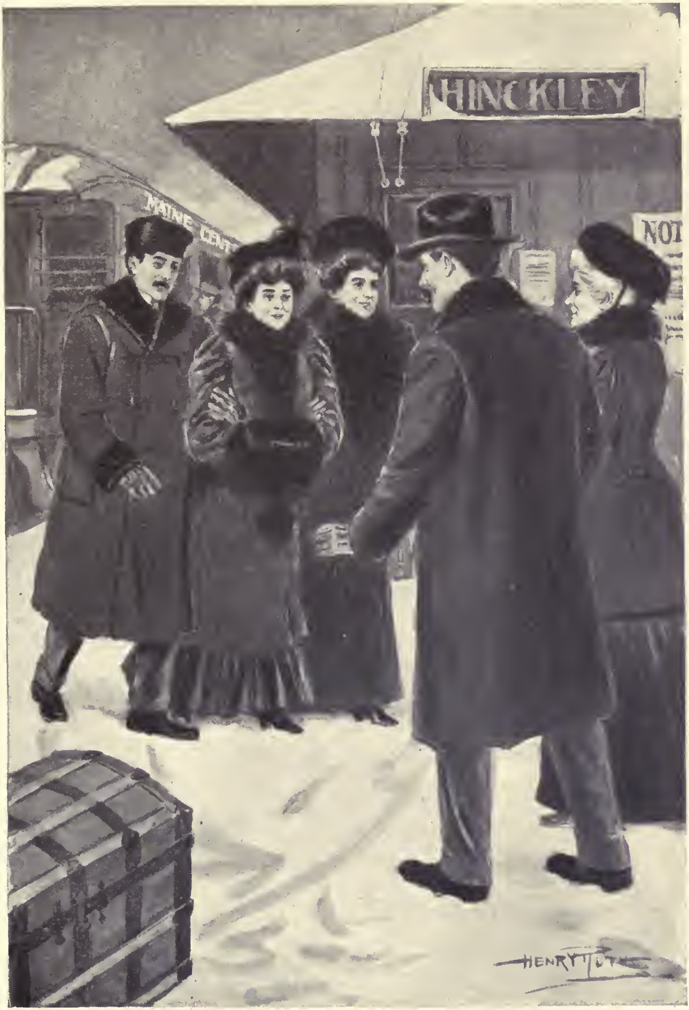
Something else, equally pleasing, yet more astonishing, came to Mark later for one day while Agnes was out on an errand, Cindy, garbed so modestly that he scarce knew her, entered his office.

" Why, Cindy," he exclaimed in a both surprised and pleased tone, " how are you and why have you kept hidden since that night? Myrtle received all the flowers you sent to the hospital but your face would have done her more good. Why didn't you call?"

" I did every day until I found she was out of danger," responded Cindy, looking pleased, " but I didn't ask to go in. I wasn't sure you — you'd care to have me, Mr. Mason."

" Oh, nonsense," he returned briskly, " I'm broader than that and you are still her old-time friend." Then he added the facts, all-important to him of Myrtle's recovery, where she now was, and how her mother had been found.

" So I was told at the hospital," answered Cindy, sighing, " and no one is more pleased at Myrtle's good fortune than I am. She deserves it all. I called," she added hurriedly, as if conscious Mark was wondering why she had, " to send a good-bye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A new beauty, the exquisite charm of loving and being loved, glorified her face. — *Page 501.*

message to Myrtle and my love. I'm going away from here for good."

"Going away!" he exclaimed in surprise, "what for? And what does it mean?"

"Because I am sick and tired of this life of mine," she answered slowly and looking away. "Tired of despising myself and being despised by all men and scorned by decent women as I am. And I'm going to end it all now. I'm going away — I don't know where to," she added plaintively, "but some place where I can find work. And I shall change my name and live different, if I starve. Please tell Myrtle," she contineud, swallowing a sob, "and ask her not to forget me and that I shall always love her as of old."

Then she rose to go.

"Sit down, Cindy," Mark now almost commanded, for it had come to him as an utter surprise, "and tell me more about your plans. You are still Myrtle's friend and you are not going away in this manner without a word of advice. When did you reach this sensible conclusion?"

"That night you carried Myrtle to the hospital in your arms," she answered directly, "for then, and the first time in my life I saw myself as I was and I went to my room and cried for hours."

Then Mark began to think and to think rapidly.

He was used to studying human nature, knew the counterfeit from genuine on sight, and up to this moment had had no faith or belief this Cindy would ever rise above her chosen life. And yet here she was with a vein of pure gold coming to the surface, the ring of honesty in her words, and ready to face what Myrtle had faced!

"I congratulate you, Cindy," he said earnestly after a pause and still watching her downcast face. "And let me assure you I am now your friend. I'm not going to preach to you," he added slowly after another pause, "I don't believe in that method. But I'm going to offer you a helping hand, and for Myrtle's sake and because you came to her that night of despair, you must accept it."

"I didn't come here to ask for help," she returned, her eyes filling, for this was the first time any man had ever offered it to her in an honest way, "I only came to send good-bye to Myrtle."

"I know it," he said smiling, "but I hope to report pleasanter news to her, and now I've a business proposition to make you and plans I want you to assist me in carrying out. First, as you may not know, Cap'n Jud has gone the way he came near driving Myrtle, and I am now the owner of Folly Island. I propose and plan as soon as spring comes to strip it of every vestige of his occupancy, build a summer home there for Myrtle, her mother and myself, and as Aunt Perth must be cared for I shall erect a small cottage for her at Sandy Bay where she can end her days in comfort. I also need some one to take care of her, and now I've this to offer you. Instead of your going away as you propose into a world of strangers, I want you to return to Sandy Bay and keep house for her. If you will, I will pay you fifty dollars a month and all house bills as long as she lives and then I'll give you a deed of the house as a present. You can also have your sister with you at no cost to her. What say you, Cindy? Is it a bargain?" And then this practical man who solved all problems by the rules of business and common sense smiled at the girl who sat watching him.

But she was scarce able to answer at all just then, and when she did it was brokenly.

"I — I can't thank you," she said finally between the choked-back sobs, "but — but I'll do my best to deserve this help, and I swear to God, whom I still believe in, neither you nor Myrtle shall ever again have cause to feel shame for me."

Then she raised her head and Mark saw in her defiant glance through tears, that that won his faith entirely and made him proud of his own offer.

And she kept faith with him and two years later married a young fisherman of Sandy Bay and became a devoted wife.

When midsummer came again and new-mown hay perfumed Good Will Farm, a few tried and true friends met there to participate in an ordinary yet always joyous event. Amos and Mrs. Orton, Aunt Perth and Cindy came up from Sandy Bay, Farmer Cony and "Mother" also and Mary Ann and Agnes from the city. They, invited by Myrtle weeks ahead of the wedding-day — with ample means, enclosed for suitable clothing — found the trip a marvel in its way, for never before had they journeyed beyond the suburbs of Athens.

"Shure," said Agnes, after kissing Myrtle again and again in ecstatic manner, "shure, me darlin', I'm so glad to see ye I cud ate ye! An' ye do be growin' so handsome I wouldn't know ye in the city. But it's a long ways up here, so it be," she rattled on, "an' I niver knew before how big the wurrld was. An' thar war places we wint through fer miles wid nothin' but trees alongside an' when we stopped thar war folks waitin' jist to see the train go by. I s'pose they do be lonesome livin' so fur away. An' I saw wood, too, long stacks of it iverywhere so plenty. Shure the country must be foine to live in winters an' kape warm so aisy."

Next day came the all-important episode of this reunion in Good Will's little church and then Mark and Myrtle hied themselves away to Conway Hollow.

A month later — and the first time for Myrtle since her midnight flight — this quite happy pair returned to Folly Island. A few changes had taken place in the interim, new to her eyes at least, for a handsome cottage built of beach stones now stood where her ancient rookery of a home once had, and its wide verandas and beautiful furnishings, gave every promise of cozy summer comfort. Not a vestige of the old spider-leg wharf, fish-house or barnacled wreck remained, but where they once were was a pretty boat-house with piazzas overlapping the cove and alongside a new wharf, lay a sizable power boat with canopy and inviting cushions. The old bridge only had been left intact, beneath it the tidal current still eddied and swirled as of yore, and adown the island where they soon strolled hand in hand, the sea gulls were still circling above and about the little cove where Myrtle had once fed them. Her flower garden, replanted and cared for, was now a variegated glow of color, and most suggestive forethought of all, a neat and well-built wall of white and brown stones with lattice gate enclosed her playhouse as if that sacred trysting-spot and poem of a child-woman's heart must ever be protected and preserved.

And here beside this they halted.

And now Myrtle with all the flood-tide of old memories sweeping her backward to an unloved past, first glanced out over the broad ocean whose monotone once seemed a requiem, then down to the hut beside which she had knelt at midnight to ask God's help, and then at Mark's smiling face.

And now at this supreme moment of her life when past, present, and future were joined in her heart, her eyes filled.

"Tut, tut, my darling," he said tenderly gathering her in his arms, "no more tears now."

"Sometimes they come from perfect happiness," she answered.

Then he kissed her.

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